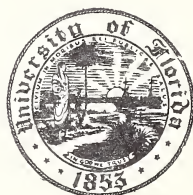





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IDYLS OF THE GASS

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BY

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THE GASS

IDYLS OF THE GASS

I

THE GASS

At the lowest part of the village, along the banks of the stream, whose windings it follows, stands a long, close, irregular double row of houses, known popularly as the *Judengasse* (Jews'-street).

The village lies upon a gentle, rounding slope, not unlike the side of one of the shallow basins in which the housewives "set" their milk, and to the contents of the basins may be likened the disposition of its inhabitants' dwellings; the mansions of *Herr Bürgermeister* and the local aristocracy having risen cream-like (nay, we would not say scum-like) to the top, the houses of the common people going down-

ward, in order of degree of commonness, and at the bottom, the very dregs, are the homes of the people of the *Gass*.

There is an ancient belief, so strongly grounded as to have become proverbial, that all Jews are rich. Who has not heard the saying, "rich as a Jew"? And yet it appeared as if these gray crooked houses of the Gass had gravitated to the bottom through the great weight of their poverty. Indeed, after centuries of fallacy, it has at last been discovered that the Jews as a people are the poorest on earth. Yet there have lived men in the Gass who, in peaceful intervals, between the periodical outbursts of Jew-baiting, acquired wealth, and, in their day, might have bought up *Herr Bürgermeister* plus his coterie. Even *Reb Noach*, the present *Cræsus*, had he chosen, could have exchanged his wealth for the *rentier's* noble mansion on the heights (four front windows, a bell-handle, and two plaster dogs in the gar-

den), and still have enough left "with which to make a good Sabbath."

No, the real reason is this: for so many ages have the Jews of Maritz lived in that crooked row by the stream that, like their ancestral dwellings and the ancient nut-tree by the pump, they seem as if rooted to the soil, and for this firm lodgment they are indebted to a paternal government, which for centuries more remote than do recount the chronicles of the Gass, and with constant zeal, though by varying methods, has determined for them all the trivial no less than the important acts of their lives: at what they shall labor and at what not labor; what they shall learn and not learn; what they shall wear or not wear; when, where, and how they shall pray; with less effect also, what they shall believe, and among countless other kindnesses, where they shall live; and to this day you can see, at the head of the street, the great rusty hinges, where hung, not so

long ago, the strong gates behind which they were securely locked every night.

Christoph, the farmer, laughed when his friend Anshel explained to him the nature of these relics. Hey! to think of crooked Itzig and apoplectic Reb Yoiness and timid little Moishè and their kind caged behind formidable bars!

“Say, Christoph,” replied Anshel, “when thy lambs are in danger of wolves, dost thou go chasing wolves? No, thou buildest a strong gate to thy sheepfold. Am I right?”

Christoph stood gaping, but Anshel screwed his face into a knot and winked.

It was not a bad way to explain the gates of the ghetto.

And now, while yet we stand at the old gates, pray be warned lest there be displeasure and disappointment later. It is a poor and ordinary sort of place at the best. You would laugh, I think, at the modest sum which is counted a fortune there; at

the trifle which makes a competence; at the pittance on which one can live and pay school-money for six children. You would scoff at the simple merriment which is got there out of a clown and fiddler; you would scorn the homely Sabbath dishes, whose anticipated flavor comforts the stomach through a long, hard week of bread and cheese; you would wonder at the joy with which one feeds for days on a bit of Talmud wisdom, a "good word" which the rabbi gives forth in his weekly *Shiur* (Talmud lecture). And do not be deceived into believing you will find any fascinating problems there (they are so fashionable now, served hot and hot with spicy vices). No, I can promise no such tempting fare in the Gass. There are, alas, many problems, but all of the bread and butter order, and the moral law is yet as purely simple there as when it was first proclaimed from Mount Sinai.

There is another fashion now the rage,

for gilt and sugar romance; a sweet fashion this, wholesome yet elegant, but to those who love the sweep of silken garments and the clank of spur and sword sounding through the pages of a book, to those I say, "Turn back."

A sword in the Gass! 'Tis a fearsome thing that one holds gingerly on fingertips when Shayè Soldier is home on a furlough, and lays carefully away on the topmost shelf until he is ready to depart. As for silken gowns—there! I had almost forgotten *Frau* Blümele's black *reps* and *Frau* Malka's dotted one. But they do not sweep. No, one carries them carefully bunched to the ankles.

So turn back, ladies and gentlemen. This is only an old crooked street, just wide enough to hold a stream of sunlight at noon; with worn, cobble pavements, where puddles lie in wet weather and dust drifts in dry—a street full, O very full, of poor, plodding Jews with "eyes, hands, or-

gans, dimensions, senses, affections, passions," like all the rest of God's human creatures, though counted peculiar and alien in the world:—men, women, and children such as you could find in a thousand other Jews'-streets, in as many obscure villages.

Pray go to the heights, where stands *Herr Bürgermeister's* noble mansion. He has a daughter who reads George Sand in the original, and adores "Elective Affinities;" there is a vase of Hungarian pottery in his window; also, there is a view.

I for my part am going into the Gass, let follow who will. I cannot resist. I have simply got to see who is singing that lively *Lecho Dodi* (Sabbath hymn), and on a common week-day, too. With a vim and a swing and a go worthy of the best *Ober-Chazan* (chief singer), the beautiful old melody comes riding on the air, as if the Sabbath stood waiting at the gate.

Ah! there he sits, the jolly *Bochur* (Talmud student), on Mendel Shuster's (Mendel the cobbler's) door-step, wagging his head and trilling like a lark. He is nursing one stockinged foot in his lap, while Mendel, anticipating by half a century our modern institution of "soles and heels while you wait," is hammering away at the boot thereof.

It is well known that the bride celebrated in song is the dear holy Sabbath, and though I would not for the world put our *Bochur's* piety in doubt, I fear it is not the one he has in mind.

"Come, beloved, to greet the bride," he shouts, and his voice and his glances go straight as a shot down to the street-pump where stands ———.

I warned you they were a common lot; ordinary love-making at the very start; on a public thoroughfare and in open daylight, too!

He is only a beggar-student, who eats

Täg,¹ she is only the daughter of the feather-woman, who lives by stripping feathers for the beds of the rich, and yet his black eyes dance like the sparkles in the brook, and she droops her lashes, her face flushing like the dawn, quite as if he were a *Familiant*,² and she had a dowry.

There are not many people in the street; the men, mostly peddlers and small tradesmen, have carried their wares to the neighboring market-town; the women are within keeping house or tending shop.

But now the school is let loose, and the street is flooded with children. They chatter loud and earnestly over their games of catch-ball, and those that play at hop-tag leap about with tense, solemn faces as if they were performing the serious business of life.

There is one little boy among them

¹ Literally, "days;" meaning that he eats on different days at the table of various charitable people.

² Possessing a legal right to marry.

who does not play. He walks beside an old woman, who leads him by the hand. She is not so tall as some of the children romping about her, but quite as straight and brisk and agile as any of them. He is so short that his fat legs fairly twinkle in their effort to keep pace with her.

There is a most satisfied sort of smile playing about the little woman's mouth; she looks self-conscious and boastful. Just see her glance slyly from side to side! O the vain old woman! To look at her face one would think that she has on a brand new kerchief, and a gold chain at least a yard long. But she has not; no, just her old brown stuff dress and black cap, which are as familiar to the Gass as is the old street-pump.

Then what is she so vain of? Can it be of the little boy whom she leads by the hand? She holds him cautiously, as if he were made of porcelain, and when she

meets a neighbor, she looks wistful in her effort not to look proud.

“Good-day, Maryam,” says the neighbor; “how is the little lad?”

“God give him life and health,” cries Maryam devoutly; and “He is already learning at the Flood,” she rapturously whispers in the other’s ear.

The people seeing her from their doorway say:

“What nonsense, the way she makes herself *meshugge* (crazy) with that *Yüngel* (little lad)! Why must she go fetch him from school? Is she afraid some one will eat him?”

They are blind. They do not know that Maryam walks through the street with her grandchild Shimmelè, who is known in the Gass as the *Bochurlè* (little scholar), for the same reason that Frau Malka goes to the synagogue when she has a new cap.

They enter a small house, older, grayer, and more crooked than most of the old,

gray, crooked ones there; its sole beauty is a flourishing window-box, a rare thing in the Gass, which at first sight you might take for an ornament, but which proves to hold but two green rows, one of leek and one of parsley, condiments both highly essential in Maryam's art of cooking. The house stands at an elbow of the street, and thus commands what is quite a view for the Gass.

Would you not like to enter with them and observe the Gass from its bright window? Would you not like to hear what Shimmelè chatters about all day long, and the sage tales that Maryam tells him, and why she is so vain?

Perhaps you think it is not worth while—an old woman and a little child. Perhaps you would wish them first to obtain a "character" from the neighbors. Well, there comes Itzig Polack, the teacher. He certainly is a responsible party.

"*Muhmè* Maryam?" cries Itzig; then he

draws up his shoulders, screws his face into a fearful grimace, lays his finger against his nose, and whistles through his pursed up lips, "Pui, a *Muhmè* Maryam!" and "Pui, a Shimmelè!"

Extravagant praise that? Well, perhaps it is; Reb Itzig is inclined to be an extremist.

But there sits Frau Malka at her window, calm, corpulent, and prosaic. She has been Maryam's neighbor for twenty years. Surely she ought to know.

"Come in, come in," cries Frau Malka. "Fradel, put on the coffee-pot! *Nu*, take a seat. Of Maryam you wish to know? Is it a wedding cake? You may trust her; my head on it, you will be pleased. Such a cook one does not meet with every day. Have you never heard what the Count said? He was at Shlomè's one day to see about the new lease, and Frau Perl served him a glass of wine and a piece of tart. *Nu*, will you believe it? He ate every bit

and licked the crumbs off his moustache. 'Not bad that,' he said, 'not bad.' My word, that's what he said. Maryam made it! But what she sees in that Shimmelè of hers to make such a fuss about is more than I can understand, and at her age, too. *Soll ich leben, meshugge!* But beyond that she is clever! As I live, she can *pasken* (answer ritual questions) as well as any rabbi. I well remember the answer she sent me one day. I was expecting my mother-in-law, and had just got a beautiful dish of cream for supper. Well, what do you think that little rascal, my cat Mizi, did? He jumped on the shelf, and began to lick at the cream. '*Wai!*' I cried, 'the cream is *trefa*' (ritually unclean, hence forbidden), for Miz had just finished gnawing a soup-bone. Imagine my fix! The milk-woman was gone, my mother-in-law *could* not drink coffee without cream. I wanted to send and ask the rabbi if we might use the cream, but he was away to a wedding.

Then I thought of Maryam. 'If Miz washed his snout after the soup-bone,' said Maryam, 'the cream is not *trefa*.' I knew that Miz always did wash after eating, so we had the cream for supper. *Ai*, a smart woman, Maryam! They do say she reads German books with not a word of *Yiddishkeit* (Judaism) in them. *Nu, mei' Sorg!* I have heard tell that there are even rabbis nowadays who study Latin. If they, why not she? I tell you she has a true Jewish heart. She has, *nebbich*, not much, and must work hard for her little bite to eat. As I live, she gives away more than she has. But to talk to her one would not guess how smart she is. She likes nothing so well as to talk about cats. She loves to listen for hours while I talk about my Mizi," says the childless Frau Malka.

This is a neighbor's report. Would you wish to consult still a higher authority? Very well, here comes the rabbi, the venerable Reb Yoshè Levison. His long beard

lies like spun silver upon his breast; he leans heavily on his staff; his eyes are bent on the ground as if in thought, yet he will gladly stop and listen to all who wish him to hear. His lips smile benignly, and his mild eyes light up with pleasure when you inquire about Maryam's grandchild.

"Shimmelè," he says, "a blessed little lad; he will some day be a great *Chocham* (scholar), but he needs a little *Makkes* (beating) now and then to keep him humble," and his eyes twinkle roguishly as he speaks. But when he speaks of Maryam it is with an air almost of solemnity.

"If all Israel were like Maryam, Jerusalem would never have been destroyed," he says. "As far as she is concerned, the Messiah can come to-day."

Truly this must convince you that it will be worth your while to enter Maryam's house. I for my part am going in; for, if the truth must out, it is for no other reason that I have come.

I might, if I chose, tell you the fairy-like tale of the wealth of the Rothschilds, or the fascinating story of the Jew who rose to the papal throne of Rome; I might take you to the romantic old ghettos of Spain or the ancient one at Rome,—their very stones echo with memories of thrilling events,—but I prefer to come to the old Jews'-street of Maritz and tell its homely tales: how they lived and loved, how they laughed and wept, how they worked and prayed, and how in the end they suffered a mighty though unrecorded martyrdom, because I know that droning in its dingy synagogue, or coming round its queer corners, or laboring in this little house, I shall find Maryam, the pastry-cook, and Shim-melè, the *Bochurlè*, without whom the fairest Gass in the world were to me a place without light or life, a thing void of zest or flavor, as tasteless as bread without salt.

II

SHIMMELE AND MUHMÈ
MARYAM

II

SHIMMELÈ AND MUHMÈ MARYAM

Shimmelè was four years old when he went to live with Maryam, called *Babelè* (granny) by him alone, *Muhmè* Maryam (Aunt Miriam) by the rest of the world, and it came about in this wise.

Maryam lived alone in her little house in the village, while her two sons, Yossef and Shlomè, worked a farm, which the latter, Shimmelè's father, had leased from the Count.

Two or three times a month Maryam journeyed afoot the fifteen miles which lay between her and her children, but from the day she discovered that Shimmelè was a prodigy (Shimmelè being a fifth-born this fact had escaped his parents), all this changed.

It was at the dinner-table when grace after meals was being said, which in Shlomè's house was always the long grace, when Maryam noticed that Shimmelè was chanting along, three words ahead of his father, and wagging his head thereto with the ardor of a *Zaddik*.

Maryam stared open-mouthed until the child finished, chirping: "I have been young, and now am old, yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken nor his seed begging bread."

"People, people, did you hear?" cried Maryam in delight.

"What?"

"The child!"

"*Nu*," said his father with a shrug, "why should my *Yüingel* not know how to *bensh* (say grace)?"

Shimmelè, still in comfortable unconsciousness of the greatness of his feat, rifled Maryam's pocket undisturbed, but Maryam continued to stare as if she had

been granted a sudden vision of *Gan Eden* (Paradise).

After this not three days passed but Maryam spent part of one hovering over Shimmelè. She arose in the night, and when the family at the farm were seating themselves for breakfast, she had already covered the fifteen miles of road, and was there to take it with them. Her children remonstrated.

“At thy age, mother! At least let me send the wagon to fetch thee,” urged Reb Shlomè.

“*Ach*, what! A few steps. I am not of the weaklings of nowadays.”

Then would she be seen beckoning to Shimmelè mysteriously from a corner.

“Shimmelè, my gold, I’ve a sugar-bun in my pocket. Now say grace after meals.”

And Shimmelè, fixing his mouth for sugar-bun, rattled off the long grace, while Maryam smiled and wagged her head with

keen delight, like a music-lover at the opera.

One day the secret was out.

“Let me have Shimmelè,” pleaded the old woman.

“Mother, what art saying!” cried Perl, Shimmelè’s mother. “The child would grieve unto death away from me. Shimmelè, wouldst leave me and go live with thy granny?”

Shimmelè dug his fingers through his mother’s apron-band and looked doubtful. Then he remembered that Maryam is that entrancing creature whose pocket holds a seemingly inexhaustible store of crooked bits of sugar.

“I’d like it,” he decided promptly.

“Woe is me!” cried Perl. “Who ever heard of a Jewish mother parted from her child!”

“Who speaks of parting?” said Shlomè, her husband. “Does he not go to his grandmother? Thou hast four others,

and," he added softly, "my mother is a lonely woman."

Perl pressed the child to her heart, but Maryam's patient, wistful face prevailed, so Shimmelè went to live with his grandmother.

He found Maryam's house a pleasant place to live in, for, though it contained only two rooms, one of them was the fascinating *Backstub* (bake-room), where her famous cakes and tarts were made, and where stood the great oven in which the Sabbath dinners of the whole congregation were cooked.

In those days an "abomination" who would touch fire on the Sabbath was still unknown in the Gass, and Maryam's great oven, whose fire, which glowed for twenty-four hours, was kindled on Friday afternoon, did service for all.

To you unfortunates whose palates have never made acquaintance with her creations, be it known that Maryam was an

artist, famed far and wide for her skill in cookery. Indeed, there was not a festivity within ten miles around for which she did not prepare the feast. Odd times, when betrothals, weddings, and *Bar Mitzvahs* were not pressing, she filled in with the baking of small cakes, *Küchele*, made of almonds and hard-boiled eggs. These keep well when packed in earthen jars, and are useful for unforeseen occasions, such as an unannounced visit from a rich relative; in which event the whole Gass felt secure in the accessibility of these dainties.

Maryam's cakes played a prominent rôle at many a *Beschau*,¹—an occasion on which the desired bridegroom came to inspect the would-be bride,—when they served as a toothsome though false evidence of her highly-prized culinary accomplishments.

Shimmelè had never in his life been away from the farm, and at first he was

¹ Literally, "inspection."

dazed by the mysteries of a new world, where out-of-doors was so narrow and small, with a wonderful thing of stone in the middle of it; not a well nor a brook, yet spitting water out of a black mouth all day long. And where the people lived in rows, like cows in stalls, but all the rest was a jumble, for you could not tell which was yours and which another's, there being neither hedges nor fences. And where granny went to a mysterious somewhere, and came back with a jug of milk, though there was not a cow to be seen. And she said, "Shimmele, go fetch me a dozen eggs," and though you looked and looked, you could not find a single nest.

And wonder of wonders. Not sheep but children—truly, children—went to pasture in this strange world; all running, like sheep, one way in the morning and back again later in the day. And there was a strange place, called *Schul*, lofty and vast as a forest, where people prayed. Not sing-

ing quietly in a corner like father; no, they shouted and shook and beat their breasts, and one, the *Chazan* they called him, stood in the midst of them, roaring most mightily,—because he had a toothache, he held his cheek all the time.

But more wonderful than all these was Babelè herself. Babelè baked tarts, but hear, O world, and wonder! she *sold* them. O the madness of it, to have tarts and not eat them!

Yet not for long lived Shimmelè's wonder, for, like a sluggish little brook which suddenly finds a slope, his mind now rushed through the lands of knowledge, and in a little while it had passed the everyday world of the Gass, and run on to the mighty fields of "learning."

"And Abraham was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold," or some equally wonderful bit would Shimmelè cry on coming home from *Cheder*, whereat Maryam dropped her rolling-pin and shook her

head, glorying in her heart, "A miracle, a wonder from God!"

Who was there in the Gass to dispute Maryam's word?

"A wonder-child," insisted she. "A wonder-child," repeated the Gass, and in time they came to believe it.

Yet it must be confessed that for a genius Shimmelè's external was remarkably normal. He was not pale nor pensive; he was not given to attitudes of gazing ecstatically heavenward or with forefinger pressed to brow, as you see geniuses in pictures; in fact, there was nothing at all unusual about the physical Shimmelè—just a little round boy, with a shock of tawny curls, big gray-blue eyes, two puffy pink cheeks, and a mouth which was never closed, for the reason that another question immediately popped it open again.

"But, Babelè, where is God?"

"God is everywhere, my child."

"Also in the sun, moon, and stars?"

“ Also there.”

“ But supposing there were no world, no sun, moon, or stars, just nothing, then where would God be? ”

“ He would still fill out all space, for God is always—and now hold thy tongue with thy nonsense.”

A pause while you count three.

“ Babelè? ”

“ Yes, my child.”

“ Suppose there were no God, then— ”

“ *Shah, Epikaurus* (infidel)! ”

.
Within the compass of a month this quaint pair had become inseparable friends, and Maryam viewed the past with amazement, an unthinkable void which held not Shimmelè.

Shimmelè, too, soon preferred his home with Maryam to the one he had left on the farm. There he had been of little consequence, but one of five; here he was all in all, both the rising and the setting of Mar-

yam's sun. He pondered with wonderment as to how the *Backstub* had existed without him; who had seeded the raisins, blanched the almonds, and dripped the vanilla while Maryam stirred the dough; who had wound her knitting-yarn, run her errands, and eaten the hard crusts which her old teeth could not bite.

Indeed, his uses to Maryam soon became manifold; not least among them was his service as her newsbearer. Fortunate for Maryam that she had not been fed on the diet of modern newspapers, else had she found but little taste in Shimmelè's manner of reporting. He usually told the truth, for he lacked imagination, and having a good memory he quoted verbatim. A dull and profitless manner this, as everyone very well knows.

"*Now* only do I know what is going on in the world," Maryam would say with deep conviction.

When he came back from his daily at-

tendance at *Schul*, he and his grandmother went through a performance that might have figured in a game of charades to represent a page of Talmud (granting, of course, the wild premise that charade-players know the looks of a Talmud page)—Shimmelè the *Mishnah*, brief and in large letters, Maryam the *Gemarah*, smaller text but voluble. It went thus. Shimmelè announced: "Anshel Dorfgeher had *Yahrzeit*, he wept terrible."

Maryam commented: "*Nu*, why should he not weep? And if he wept as many tears as there flows water in the Moldau, could he wash away his sins? The Lord will have enough to do if He forgives him all the inches he snips off every yard he sells, the *Ganef* (thief)."

When Maryam's neighbor Malka, who often sat for hours with her knitting in the *Backstub*, was present, the likeness to a Talmud page was complete, for Malka represented the running commentaries with

which the page is framed, and was most voluble of all.

At such times Shimmelè learnt all that was to be known of contemporary events.

"Yentelè was in *Schul* to-day," said Shimmelè.

"Yentelè!" cried Maryam. "What sort of *Yontov* is to-day? For Yentelè one could change the proverb and say, 'Out of boredom she is pious.'"

"Nay, nay," said Malka, "Yentelè is not so pious. I know why she went—to *keek* after the men. 'At thy age, Yentelè!' I said to her one day, and she got dreadfully angry. 'You are also like the rest,' she said, 'and think measles and marriage are only for the young. I tell you one is never too old for either.'"

"There was also a stranger there," said Shimmelè, "with Salmè Sofer."

"A stranger? Perhaps Salmè's cousin, Awrom Zaddik."

"What was he like?" asked Malka.

“A thin one who carries his head in his shoulders as if he were always dodging a slap? And a face he has like the seven years of famine, what?”

“’Tis he,” said Shimmelè.

“Now I know what Yentelè was doing in *Schul*,” cried Malka. “She’s angling after Awrom Zaddik.”

“What, is she such a fool?” laughed Maryam. “Nay, nay, Yentelè, thou art too old a little worm; none would bite into thee for fear of breaking his teeth.”

“He’s come to *Beschau* for Yentelè, I’ll bet my head,” cried Malka with sudden conviction. “Only last week my nephew, who is a clerk at Reb Noach’s, told me that Yentelè bought stuff for a new bodice. ‘A new bodice?’ thinks I. ‘*After* Pesach—what for?’”

“*Soll ich leben*, Malka, perhaps thou art right!” cried Maryam. “Here lately Yentelè has been talking nothing but *Shtuss*. ‘If a man writes in a letter of a maiden:

Does she still make such good pickled herring? do you think he means anything?' she asked me one day. She must have meant Awrom."

"Now I know," cried Malka excitedly, "why her father keeps running to the city; he is borrowing a dowry from his rich relatives."

"Now I know what Gitel wanted of those *kosher Küchel*," cried Maryam. "She and Yentelè are as thick as peas together. He'll be having supper at Gitel's."

"Maryam, Maryam!" cried Malka triumphantly. "'Twill be a *Shidduch* (match), as I live!"

.

The children of the Gass envied Shimmelè because he lived in the little house where it always smelled of good things to eat, and where there were pots of sweet dough to scrape and stems of raisins to nibble. But where is there bliss that is unalloyed? Was it not an ogre that lived in

the sugar house? And Shimmelè had a bogie, and its name was prayers; a fearful and persistent terror this from which there was no escaping.

Save in her cooking and baking, Maryam was not so regular in any other of her occupations as in this of teaching Shimmelè the Hebrew prayers. When he was five years old, he could read every word in the thick *Siddur*; when he was six, he had been through the *Chumesh* (Pentateuch) from beginning to end.

At half past four in the morning Maryam was at his bedside, saying:

“Shimmelè *Leben* (my life), come, get up, it’s time for prayers.”

First they recited psalms, Maryam one verse and Shimmelè repeating, but when the pale, white day came peeping over the housetops, he began to pray. And Shimmelè, hardly as high as the table, stood in the cold morning, one foot pressed upon the other to warm his toes. On his head

was a small velvet cap; in his arms, a large black prayer-book, too thick for his small hands to grasp, which he held in his outstretched arms as though it were an infant. The weight of sleep still lay heavy upon his eyelids, but he chanted the long prayers without skipping a line. Nay, not a single word did he slur, for a pair of sharp ears were on the alert; the soup-pot purred sweetly, and granny's hand ruled the ladle.

To and fro swayed his fat little body while he rocked on his numb toes to warm them.

"We beseech Thee, O Lord, to make the words of Thy law pleasant in our mouths;" but the words of the Law were not pleasant to Shimmelè at that moment. He was wishing that his hands were free that he might rub his tingling dot of a nose, which glowed red and shining in his white face, like a cherry on a tart.

Had the Gass been less rigid in its religious observances, he might have had

comfort; but its piety was unbending, so Shimmelè's face was turned eastward, toward Zion the Joyous, but, O mockery! it looked to the frosted window-panes and away from the precious warmth of the stove.

"Praised be Thou, O God our Lord, King of the Universe, who giveth the cock knowledge to distinguish between day and night," he chirped, and "Praised be Thou, O God our Lord, King of the Universe, who hath not made me a heathen," and "Praised be Thou," again and again, all down a long, close-printed page. No comfort in that; but a curly waif of steam from the simmering soup-pot strayed his way, and he took it in with a deep draught.

"*Mehlsupp' mit Spitzgerl* (flour-soup with mushrooms)," announced his well-trained nose.

"Ha!" rejoiced his empty stomach. And Shimmelè's voice rose high in praise.

III

HOW SHIMMELE BECAME A
SCEPTIC—

III

HOW SHIMMELE BECAME A SCEPTIC—

There are many joyous festivals and holy days in the Gass, and if you ask the children there which one is best, you will be deafened by conflicting cries:

“Peerim!” *“Nay, Peisuch!”* *“Nay, Siccus!—”*

Let them shout. We ask Shimmelè only, and he promptly pronounces for Passover, that long, happy holiday, combining in one all the joys that can be dreamed of. The Feast of Tabernacles is a close second, with the building of the booth, the gathering of greens, and the gilding of nuts; but Moses the Lawgiver did not reckon, alas, with place and climate, and sometimes as you sit in the booth under the roof of boughs, through which

the stars peep, this celebration of joy is marred by the early frosts, which nip unprotected extremities and freeze every mouthful.

The Feast of Esther with its maskers and its devil's rattles in derision of the archenemy, Haman, is pleasant, boisterous, rollicking, but too brief. The Feast of the Maccabees also has its charms, with its lights and presents, but there is the great trial of school. The Rejoicing of the Law is a dream, with flags and processions and barley-sugar pouring like rain from the women's gallery in the synagogue. But take it all in all, for joy unalloyed give Shimmelè Passover.

Its beginning for him lies deep in the winter, when the people bake their *Matzos* (unleavened bread), all this baking being done in Maryam's house. One by one, as each has its appointed time, the families come, bearing stacks of wood and big bags of flour, and the kneading and roll-

ing and baking begins. Maryam helps every one, and if you happen to be a favorite grandchild, this develops untold delights.

You can flit to and fro among the workers unreprieved; you can steep yourself in the delight of carrying the thin cakes, pendant over a little stick, to the oven, in doing which you must run wildly, lest in the interval between bake-board and oven the bread rise and thus become leaven, in other words *chometz*, unfit.

But the charm lies not in this, nor yet in the fragrance of the baking bread; indeed, these are common matters to Shimmelè. The real fascination is in the babel of voices and the many people, swarming as at a market-place in this usually quiet house.

Each new group has a manner of its own, some running about and shrieking like mad during the process; but good-natured ones let you help, even to the punching of little

holes with a *Rädlech* (little rolling cog-wheel) into the unbaked cakes.

Everyone who is not employed runs in to have a look; even the *Bochurim* (Talmud students), enticed by the sounds of light-hearted laughter, which flows like crystal rills out of Maryam's crooked windows, find sudden business to take them past the house. The staid ones glance in bashfully; the fat one with the jolly eyes puts his head boldly in.

"What dost want, *Bochur*?" cries Maryam, with twinkling eyes. "Hast already the whole *Gemorah* in thy head that thou hast time to go a-walking?"

But the *Bochur* only laughs and beckons Shimmelè slyly to him. "Say to Vögelè (or Blümelè or Täubelè as the case may be, for although it was always the same *Bochur*, the maidens changed from year to year), "say to her: 'As the lily among thorns so is my love among the daughters.'"

Then Shimmelè elbows his way to a conscious looking maiden, her white arms deep in the kneading trough.

“As the lily among thorns so is my love among the daughters,” gurgles Shimmelè.

“Hold thy tongue, *Shegetzel*,” titters the maiden.

“Can I help it? The jolly *Bochur* said it.”

Shimmelè dodges a slap, and goes to report results. He despises the whole business, message and motive, but there is a reward, depending upon results, and ranging from bits of sweet-wood up to the vanishing heights of small coin.

“What did she say?” whispers the *Bochur*.

“Nothing.”

“Nothing!” O melancholy!

“But her face glowed red like the rose of Sharon,” says the sly Shimmelè.

“Ha, ha, impudent face, what knowest thou about the rose of Sharon?”

Reward, one penny.

Then, when the *Matzos* are all baked, comes the seeding and chopping of raisins for wine; and when the wine is gently steeping in jugs, Eisak Schulklopper brings a great loaf of sugar bearing the rabbi's seal, which certifies that it is *Pesachdik*,¹ in other words, immaculate. Then you pound sugar in a mortar for hours at a time, or grate almonds, cheerfully sacrificing bits of cuticle off your finger ends to the holy cause; while through it all pervades an exciting sense of hazard, lest one should, God forbid, lay a *Yontovdik*¹ edible on a *chometzig*² spot.

And when all is done, up drives Maier, the hired man, and into the wagon you pile a great stack of snowy *Matzos*, with crisp brown edges, and bottles of raisin wine, and a jar of cakes, then mount and away you go, homeward to the farm.

¹ Proper for the festival.

² Leaven, hence forbidden.

What matter that it is bleak and cold. Babè Maryam has wrapped you well in a shawl; there is a hot brick at your feet, and Maier lets you hold the reins while you spin down the hard, dry road that lies straight on the earth, like an immense pea-stick, its pointed end at the horizon, sticking into the sky.

Then, what new joys at home! The house has been cleansed from top to bottom; there is not a crack or corner that has not been scoured and polished and purified for the festival. Nevertheless, it is father's duty to seek out and gather up the last crumbs of leaven, which may have been overlooked. For this end, he peers with the aid of a lighted candle into all the corners and cupboards, and that his search may not be in vain, mother has laid little heaps of bread crumbs, as much as a thimbleful, on convenient shelves.

You follow father in his quest; you know where the crumbs are; you tremble lest he

does not; you shriek when he finds them. Then he sweeps them with a feather into a little dish, and you bear them off in triumph.

And the next day holds still more delights. You may not eat bread, for that is *chometz* (leaven); you may not eat *Matzos*, for the festival does not begin until evening, but mother cooks a great dish of nice potato-dumplings, and you swallow the last bite without regret, for there is better to follow.

Out in the yard the children have built a fire in a pit, and into this you cast the leaven which father has gathered that it be utterly destroyed, then yours is the privilege of leaping back and forth over the flames; a delightful diversion this, containing the usually forbidden hazard of scorching your legs.

Then, when the early twilight has blotted out the day, back into the house you go, where all is so fine and festive; where lying

HOW SHIMMELÈ BECAME A SCEPTIC—

upon the table, ready for the *Seder*, is mother's best table-cloth, smelling spicy of cloves and lemon-peel, and gleaming upon it the family treasure of silver, two candlesticks and a cup, swathed all the year round in flannel, which you may admire but on this yearly occasion. And over all, aye, in the very air, there breathes a spirit of sanctity, an indescribable, joyful holiness. It twinkles in the lights and whispers on the hearth; it echoes in the voices and shines upon the faces; it thrills within the heart like a joyous song, like the first breath of spring after a long, hard winter.

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When they arrived at the farm on this, the fifth Passover of Shimmelè's life, Reb Shlomè greeted them with a peculiarly happy smile.

"Think, the pleasure," he cried, "we have a *Cohen* as guest."

Shimmelè had learned that a *Cohen* is a descendant of the high priests who minis-

tered in the holy Temple at Jerusalem, a person of rare honors and privileges, but as yet he had never clapped eyes on one; for though he had a dim knowledge that there were *Cohanim* in the Gass, he had never made acquaintance with them in their priestly capacity. He ached to see one, knowing that a priest is fine to look at; for he had once seen a Catholic one, a gorgeous creature all satin and gold, in a procession on Corpus Christi.

Disentangling himself from the family embrace, he dashed into the house and was through it on a run.

“Where have you got him?” he demanded.

“Sh—sh—” warned the family, tiptoeing at the door.

Shimmelè looked in amazement. There, by the stove, in his father’s arm-chair, sound asleep and snoring, sprawled the inevitable *Schnorrer* (beggar), in this case perhaps more dirty than usual.

“That!” cried Shimmelè in disgust, “that you call a priest!”

“*Narrelè* (little fool),” said Reb Shlomè, and smiled again, an exalted, indescribable smile—one would have to know the history of his people to understand it.

Behold him, ye of little faith. Behold Reb Shlomè, gazing with joyful reverence at his beggar-guest! His face reflects it all, the glory, the martyrdom, the faith, the hope of his people; aye, verily, the hope, and Reb Shlomè is happy.

“He is a dirty beggar,” you argue.

“He is of the house of Aaron,” and Reb Shlomè’s heart thrills proudly as he speaks.

“He is a parasite, a miscreant.”

“He will be redeemed, and his seed shall minister again in the holy Temple at Jerusalem, as the Lord has promised.”

But Shimmelè has neither faith nor hope. He fairly wriggles with questions which struggle out of him, and pesters everyone who will listen.

“ But, Babelè, when will the Temple in Jerusalem be rebuilt? ”

“ When the Messiah comes.”

“ When will the Messiah come? ”

“ Don’t talk *Shtuss* (nonsense), child! ”

“ But when will he, Babelè? ”

Maryam laughs and cries, “ Not so long as little boys ask foolish questions,” then hurries off with an armful of *Matzos*.

Shimmelè unappeased goes to find a solution in the man himself, at whom he gazes with disgust; but soon he finds himself fascinated, for he has a game on. Shimmelè having no toys had to invent his own games; they were hardly games, they were so staid. But the one he is at now is fine. It is trying to count the clean spots on the beggar, but whenever he thinks he has found one, a second look discloses a smudge. The game has its uses, too, for unto him, the doubter in the *Cohen’s* priesthood, comes the verification of another point in doctrine.

“Now I believe it, what is written,” he muses, “that man is a thing of dust. This one is so full, it leaks out through his skin.”

Reb Shlomè had scoured the neighborhood in search of a *Minyan* (religious quorum) that he might hold services next day, and the promise of a *Cohen* for the blessing, which is a rare and great privilege, brought out ten men strong.

The children received many admonitions and directions regarding devout attention and behavior during the service, prominent among them the warning to bow the head and keep the eyes closed or bent on the ground when the *Cohen* pronounces the blessing; “for then,” explained Reb Shlomè, anticipating Shimmelè’s questions, “the *Shechinah* (Spirit of God) descends from on high and rests upon him.”

Shimmelè ached to ask: “How does the *Shechinah* look? Has it wings or hands or feet? Will it come through the chimney or the roof?” But a look on the face

of his father, this man of simple faith, warned him that it was not wise. Inwardly he determined to have a look and find out.

At service he examined the surroundings, and found that the praying *Cohen* would stand directly under his mother's cheese-board, upon which reposed a dish of little holiday cheeses, mildly toasting there in the warmth of the stove.

He decided that if the Spirit of God wished to get at the *Cohen*, it would have to hover about the cheese-board, and it was upon this he determined to have an eye.

The moment arrived when, all heads bowed, the *Cohen* began to chant the blessing. Shimmelè's head, too, was bowed, but a mighty power, called Inquisitiveness, dragged his eyelids upward.

Of the *Cohen* nothing was visible, for he was wrapped wholly in his *Tallis* (praying shawl); but hovering about the cheese-board was—O wonder!—a strangely start-

ling thing. What was it? What could it be? It must be the *Shechinah*!

It had neither wings nor feet, only hands, in fact, was nothing *but* hands; a large, dirty, hairy pair, their deft fingers quickly grasping one—two—three of his mother's little cheeses.

Shimmelè tried hard to be calm. The *Shechinah* is the *Shechinah*, a holy thing. That's all very well, but his mother's nice holiday cheeses—" *Ai, wai!* " and indignation got the upper hand.

" *Tatè* " (father), he burst forth in a shrill whisper,"look—look—*De Shechinah ganefed de Käslech!* " (The Spirit of God is stealing the cheeses.)

The expected panic did not ensue. For reply he only felt a large hand clapped quickly over his mouth. But Shimmelè thought his own thoughts. He began to doubt from that day.

IV
AND A SCOFFER

IV

AND A SCOFFER

In the long calendar of feast and fast and holy days in the Gass, there are some whose waking hours are too brief to hold their elaborate devotional program, and which must be pieced out with the night. Of such are the *Selichoth* days,¹ those solemn days of penitence and prayer, when Maryam awakened Shimmelè at two o'clock of night, and made him ready for the synagogue.

The autumn nights were cold and bleak, but Maryam was a careful woman. She wrapped her long woolen shawl about him; first over his head, like a fish-wife's kerchief; then round his neck, like a haughty man's cravat; forward and crossed upon his breast, like an admiral's scarf; back

¹ Before and between New Year and Atonement.

again and tied in a knot with dangling ends, like a young lady's sash.

The street was dark and silent, the stars glittered coldly in the black sky, and the dead leaves rustled on the dry, naked stones as he set out for the synagogue. But Shimmelè knew no fear. He grasped his thick prayer-book well under his arm, set his chubby legs sturdily forward, and hurried on to his penitential devotions.

The *Schulklopper*,² in firm reliance upon Maryam's punctual piety, slept peacefully until Shimmelè knocked at his door.

"Is that thou, Shimmelè?" he grumbled from his bed. "Muhmè Maryam must have been dreaming, it's too early for *Schul*."

"It's going on three," piped Shimmelè through the key-hole.

Eisak Schulklopper then gave him a large

²Literally, synagogue knocker; a sort of undersexton, one of whose duties is to knock at the house-doors as a summons to prayers.

iron key, saying, "Well, go open the *Schul*. I'll be there soon, and *don't forget to knock!*"

Shimmelè knocked three times at the door of the synagogue, turned the key in the creaking lock, and walked into the dark, icy interior. He felt along the wall until he found the little cupboard where a candle and the matches were kept; then he struck a light, blew on his numb fingers to warm them, and waited. Eisak Schulklopper's high, quavering voice calling the men to prayers grew fainter and fainter; soon he had reached the last house, and dim figures with *Tallis*³-bags and prayer-books under their arms came hurrying down the street.

There was Yossel Kummer, whose daughter, the once beautiful Yittl, was growing old and hard, and was embittering her parents' old age with her laments.

³ Praying shawls.

Her sorrow was this, that for twelve years she had been betrothed to the man of her love, but he could not gain permission from the government to marry; for there was a price on Jewish progeny. One hundred families was the limit allowed to the district; matrimony beyond that, if procurable at all, could be purchased only at regal cost; and Moshè and Yittl were poor.

There was Anshel Dorfgeher, who sold ribbons and calicoes to the farmers' wives, earning his bread in fear and trembling, for the business, which was an inheritance, had become a forbidden one, since the government discovered that the peddling of such commodities retarded civilization.

There was Dovid Abeles, whose son was giving ten years' service in the army, where he might sacrifice his youth and strength, his blood and his life, but where he might not rise higher than a corporal.

They were for the most part poor and struggling, bent with care and labor,

stamped with the indelible mark of helpless, patient suffering; yet they left their beds at dead of night, and hurried to the synagogue to weep penitently over their sins and thank the Lord God of Israel for His boundless mercies.

Shimmelè was the only little child among them, and for two hours he stood and prayed with the men, and tried to weep as they did.

One morning, after *Selichoth* service, Shimmelè seemed strangely absent. Maryam's running commentary was forcefully interesting as usual, but in the midst of a descriptive bit he broke in with: "Babelè, why must one knock at the *Schul* before one enters?"

Maryam stopped short, looked at the child in amazement, and cried: "'I have been young, and now am old,' as it is written, but 'tis the first time in my life I have heard anyone ask that question."

"But why must one?" cried Shimmelè.

“Dost know, Shimmelè, it is not at all right to ask such questions. If everyone does it, and all who have gone before have also done it, needst thou ask why?”

“But why, Babelè?” persisted Shimmelè.

Maryam smiled.

“*Nu*, I’ll tell thee. They say the spirits of the dead go to *Schul* at night to pray, and one must warn them of one’s approach.”

Shimmelè reflected.

“Then dare we not look upon the spirits of the dead?”

Maryam stared.

“What ails the *Yüingel* to talk such *Shtuss* (nonsense)!”

“I should much like to see a spirit of the dead,” pursued Shimmelè musingly.

Maryam began to laugh softly.

“*Narrelè* (little fool),” she cried, “hast thou no fear? Dost know what they say? They say that one who looks upon such a

spirit is struck dumb; if he looks again, he is struck blind; but should he look a third time, he falls dead on the spot."

For all the "clear head" of the wonder-child the joke did not penetrate. Maryam chuckled, but Shimmelè pondered gravely.

"Babelè," he said presently, "hast ever seen one who looked upon a spirit?"

Here Maryam broke into a merry laugh.

"No, Shimmelè, my gold, him I have not yet seen!"

The next night, when Shimmelè went as usual to the *Selichoth* prayers, he carried, beside his prayer-book, a short end of candle, some matches, and a well-oiled goose quill. After he had performed his office of religious alarm-clock, taken the synagogue key with the accompanying warning, and seen the sexton's door close upon him, he suddenly ran to the key-hole and squeaked into it:

“Eisak Schulklopper, what would happen if I did not knock?”

With a jerk the door flung suddenly back, and Shimmelè fell forward into the room.

“*Bistu meshugge* (art mad)?” screamed Eisak. “Art a Jewish *Yüingel* that talks like an *Epikaurus* (infidel)! ”

“Reb Eisak *Leben*, tell me, what would happen?”

“*Shah—Shegets!* Thou hast but to try it, and thou wouldst soon find out! But this I tell thee: there was once one who did it, and when they found him, he was dead with ghostly finger marks on his throat. Now go and remember that.”

Shimmelè's eyes grew round.

“Didst see the finger marks?” he gasped, but the door slammed in his face.

It was a dark, windy night, and there were dry rustlings and soft thumpings in the air. The synagogue looked black and dismal, and there came low whisperings

through the door. Something tapped ghostily at the window as if bidding him enter.

Shimmelè stood still with high beating heart.

"I should just love to see a spirit of the dead," he thought.

He tried to peep through the key-hole, but his vision halted at a wall of dense blackness. He put his ear to a crack; a cold draught blew into it.

"Eisak said the man was dead. He was a fool; he looked three times," said Shimmelè's logic.

"I'll give just one little *Keek* and run," coaxed his curiosity.

"Then—then I'll be struck dumb," concluded his logic.

"Then—then I won't have to say any more prayers," rejoiced Shimmelè.

He lit his bit of candle in a still corner, oiled the rusty key, lest it creak and the spirits flee, then softly turned the lock.

The door flew back. With one bound Shimmelè burst into the room.

Puff!—out went the candle.

Bang!—shut flew the door.

He stood still and held his breath. Something inside of him beat like a hammer. All else was still save for a low moaning. He strained his eyes, but they seemed as if enclosed in a wall of frightful blackness. He walked a step; his boots squeaked terribly. Something inside him puffed like the blacksmith's bellows. He would have liked to scream, but his throat seemed tied up as with a cord.

"I'm struck dumb, O *wai!*" he thought.

A gust of wind shook the windows; the moaning came from all sides at once. Shimmelè strained his eyes with terror, but no ray pierced the darkness.

"I must have *keeked* twice,—*wai*, O *wai*,—I'm struck blind!"

"I'll light my candle and make sure," said his calmer second thought.

The candle had fallen to the floor, and he got down on his knees to find it.

Now, the corner of a bench is hard, and Shimmelè's head was tender, and when these two met with a vigorous thump, Shimmelè roared: "Oi!" Thus was the spell broken. His heart leaped joyfully.

"Aha, so I'm not dumb!"

Just then the light of the *Shammas'* lantern fell through the window.

"Hooray! I'm not blind!"

Then Shimmelè smiled loftily, and a bit of scorn looked out of every one of his dimples.

That morning at breakfast, while dipping his hot soup and bread, he startled his grandmother by asking:

"Who told thee about the spirits of the dead in *Schul*?"

"*Wai geschrieen!*" cried Maryam, "the *Yüngel* is utterly mad with his spirits of the dead!"

"But who told thee?"

"Be still now, Shimmelè; it is not at all well for a child to talk thus."

"But, *please*, Babelè, who told thee?"

"Who should have told me? Everyone knows that."

"Then who told everyone?"

Maryam sighed.

"It would take a great *Chocham* (scholar) to answer all thy questions."

"Was it perhaps the *Rav* (rabbi)?"

"It might have been the *Rav*."

"And who told the *Rav*?"

"I don't know," said Maryam meekly.

"Was it perhaps the High Rebbe Loew?"

"No doubt it was he."

"Then," said Shimmelè quietly, "the High Rebbe Loew was a liar."

"*Shema!*" shrieked Maryam, dropping her rolling-pin, which in its descent dragged with it a large sheet of crisp, yellow noodle-dough; but in the face of such blasphemy, noodles had suddenly retired to

the dim background of trivialities, and Maryam waited in horror for the roof to fall.

But the roof sat firm, and Shimmelè opened his mouth, and put more soup into it.

“There are no spirits of the dead in *Schul*,” he said next.

Maryam was slowly returning to life. After she had recovered her breath she cried:

“How knowest thou that?”

“I did not knock,” said Shimmelè as quietly as before, and waited with spoon poised in air for another shriek. But the unexpected happened. A smile rippled over Maryam’s soft cheeks, up to the shores of her clear, gray eyes, where it broke into a twinkle. Then she laughed softly to herself, and shook her head with wonder.

“A miracle!” she gloried in her heart. “A wonder from God! Such a child the world has not yet seen,” but to Shimmelè

she said solemnly, laying her hand upon his head :

“ Shimmelè, my life, the Lord in His seventh heaven has given thee a head of iron. Thou wilt some day be chief-rabbi; I, thy grandmother, have said it ! ”

And the next day she said :

“ Shimmelè, *thou* knowest it, and *I* know it, and it is well, ”—then with a tolerant shrug and a nod inclusive of the whole Gass, “ but why need *they* know it ? ”

Shimmelè understood; he kept his secret. From that day he was man in the house, Maryam’s helper and confidant.

V

SHIMMELÈ CHOOSES
A PROFESSION

V

SHIMMELÈ CHOOSES A PROFESSION

“There was once an Unfortunate Creature who displeased his Fellow Beings. Unwittingly he displeased them, yet they threw him into prison; bound hand and foot they caged him behind iron bars, and left him there to rot.

“And after many years there arose Righteous Men who broke the bonds of this Unfortunate Creature, and flung wide his prison gates. And the Unfortunate Creature crawled forth into the light of day, gazed with dim, bleary eyes upon a strange world, but departed not from thence.

“When his Fellow Beings saw him there, they burned with lofty scorn.

“‘Depart!’ they cried. ‘Why dost thou linger now thou art free!’

“ ‘Woe is me!’ cried the Unfortunate Creature. ‘Whither shall I go? There is no place to lay my head; this prison is my only home’; and at the prison gates sank helpless to the ground.

“And when his Fellow Beings saw him there, they spat at him and reviled him.

“ ‘Arise, thou vile one,’ they cried. ‘Leap, dance, thou grovelest like a beast, and yet art free!’

“The Unfortunate Creature raised his trembling voice and cried:

“ ‘How can I leap when my limbs are maimed? How can I dance when the wounds from my bonds still bleed?’ But his voice, too, had grown feeble in his prison; his Fellow Beings passed and heard him not.

“ ‘A vile thing,’ they said, and they lifted aside their garments and despised him.”

A true tale this and a woeful one, and the name of the Unfortunate Creature is

Israel, and his Fellow Beings are named the Christian Nations.

For twenty times one hundred years has Israel languished in bondage. Yet the world reviles it because it still bears the taint of its prison, the wounds of its fetters.

For twenty times one hundred years was Israel driven out of every Christian country on earth. However, they despise it, because it still cringes in trembling.

For twenty times one hundred years Israel was barred out of every honorable trade and calling. O, have they the heart to scorn it because it bargains with shrieking voice for a hare-skin? Not a foot of ground was Israel allowed to call its own, and yet they reproach it because it does not till the soil.

The right to eat and drink, the right to pray to God, the right to learn, the right to marry and bear children, aye, the very right to live, to breathe, Israel had to purchase with gold through the weary centu-

ries. Condemn it who dare because it loves money!

In the days of Shimmelè's childhood, when a boy of the Gass was approaching his thirteenth year, you would often see his parents' faces lined with care, and "'tis time he were put to business," you would hear them say. And the world has hated them for this.

With young Christoph it was different. He stamped his foot, flung out his young strength in his voice, and cried, "I shall be a blacksmith and carpenter," or perhaps "a magistrate, a professor." But what could Moshè do? He had but little choice. If he showed an inclination to manual labor, he might, by good fortune, if the places were not already overfilled, patch old clothes for the Gass, tinker its broken locks, or cobble its shoes. If his ambition happened to run higher, say to the glory of bricklaying, his father would throw out his hands and cry in anger:

“Fool, art gone mad? Since when will they apprentice a Jew to a trade or craft?”

No, a boy in the Gass had no choice. With a heavy pack on his back, living on dry bread, he tramped through the country, bargaining with peasants for a little flax, a handful of bristles; or he stood in the markets, sweltering or freezing, crying over his small wares.

But there was one exception; it was when the boy developed a “good head,” then “learning” was the goal, and “We have no meat? *Nu*, we will eat bread. We have no coat? *Nu*, we will freeze. Our *Yüangel* is going to be a rabbi!”

If his ambition happened to run to medicine, law, or science, they would joyfully mortgage the beds upon which they slept, and wring their hands in their pride, for too often, alas, the price of advancement in the professions was apostasy.

Maryam was descended from a line of rabbis; men of piety and uprightness, who

with love and joy, through prosperity and adversity, had "followed the Law," and it was her sore grief that this long line of learning seemed about to end. Her only brother, through a perverse fate, had taken to commerce, and it was upon Maryam that the heritage of a "head of iron" had descended. In the classes of her father, the rabbi, she had studied with the lads, and when she was still a young maiden, the people had said of her, "She is a whole *Maggid* (scholar, preacher)."

At a time when to read in any language save the holy one was counted almost blasphemous in the quiet back-villages of Maryam's native land, she went about with a German book labeled Mendelssohn—a despised name—tied up in her apron.

But Maryam, alas, was only a woman, and her learning but graced her as a sweet scent graces a flower. It attracted to her the young Talmudist, Chayim Prager, and

in marrying him she in a measure atoned for the fault of her kindred.

Yet of what avail is learning in the devastation of war, and can dialectics buy bread? Napoleon came, and Chayim's little patrimony and Maryam's little dowry scattered to the four winds of heaven, like a feeble snow-drift in a gale. Chayim had to arise from his thick volumes and wander about the land with a heavy pack of flax on his back.

Then Maryam laid her hope in her sons, but Yossef, the elder, loved his thick, hide-bound Talmud volumes only inso-much as he could make trials of his strength with them. He preferred to work at the spinning-mill, where it was his delight to pitch and toss the big bales of raw flax.

Shlomè, the younger, was a true student, and clung to his book until his mother was widowed, and his elder brother gone blind. Maryam had then to earn her bread by the

labor of her hands, yet she would joyfully have starved to keep Shlomè at his studies; but Shlomé scorned such dependence, and went to the city, where he became a private tutor. Then Maryam laid her hope in her grandchildren, but when Shlomè hid his gentle, melancholy nature away from the stress and turmoil of cities, in the quiet drudgery of the farm—"His children will grow up clods, amid rude, ignorant peasants, like trees in the forest," Maryam said, and hoped no more.

Now Maryam deeply lamented that the great gift of knowledge had wholly departed from her house, yet the Gass still saw and admired it in Maryam herself. There were people who valued her word as highly as they did the rabbi's; but there were others, intrepid souls, who in reckless moments dared question her piety. This was because Maryam's clear good sense discerned many distinctions between religious observances based upon the tradition

of the Law and those whose tradition was mere superstition.

The former she fulfilled punctiliously, though sometimes with tolerant, good-natured scorn, as when at the *Seder* a certain form is repeated with slight variation, because, as tradition has it, "Thus did our ancestor, the great Hillel." Maryam performed the service faithfully, mumbling smilingly the while, "A good fortune that the great Hillel did not stand on his head, else should we all now have to stand on our heads." The forms whose origin Maryam traced to mere superstition, she utterly ignored, save when she feared to hurt the feelings of the Gass.

It was known of Maryam that nothing could so move her as the pursuit of knowledge.

"Come along, Maryam," cried her neighbors, "see what Reb Noach has brought his wife from town. 'Tis a new kind of chair called a fool-tail (*fauteuil*), a

grand thing, all hair-cloth. One sits on it as on ice."

But Maryam only shrugged her shoulders and mumbled:

"*Nu*, Blümelè may make Sabbath with it—her fool-tail!"

But, "Maryam, hast heard, Reb Maier's Yosselè is going to give a *Droscha* (Talmud lecture) on his *Bar Mitzvah*?"¹ and she is off, horses cannot hold her.

From a fine religious performance of this kind she would return with a bitter-sweet joy in her heart.

"Why has God allowed the Crown of Learning to depart from my house?" she would complain. And then came Shimmelè! Shimmelè, the sceptic and philosopher; Shimmelè, the *Bochurlè*; Shimmelè, the independent, who defied the word of tradition; Shimmelè, the intrepid, who scorned the blankness of superstition.

¹ Ceremony of a boy's religious majority at the age of thirteen, equivalent to confirmation.

The Lord, whose Name be praised, had not forgotten her; there would again be a rabbi in the family, for, from the moment she heard her grandchild chant the grace after meals, her mind was made up, and she had a sudden vision of Shimmelè's preaching in a lofty synagogue, and all Israel running at top speed to drink in wisdom.

Maryam planned and hoped, and the vision uplifted her in her hardest trials.

Shimmelè had not been long in her house before she thought it wise to discuss his future with him.

"Hast not yet thought what thou wouldst be when thou art a man?"

"I'm going to be a teacher," replied Shimmelè promptly.

Maryam beamed proudly.

"'Tis a fine thing, a teacher, but there are still better."

"No, teacher is the best," assured Shimmelè. "Then I'll have nothing to do but

walk about this way, with a stick under my arm and take snuff—so.”

Maryam smiled, for she remembered that Shimmelè had still to be bribed with stewed plums to “follow the Law.”

Another time it was: “Shimmelè, I’d like it well if thou couldst become a rabbi.”

“A rabbi!” cried Shimmelè, “no, I’m going to be a baker.”

“A baker!” echoed Maryam blankly. Alas and alas, the prodigy!

“Yes, and I’m going to keep a *Back-stub*.”

She looked at him in dismay.

“Then I can eat as many raisins as I like—”

And then she laughed, her low, bubbling laugh which came quickly and lightly as a child’s, for what she saw was only a little bit of a boy with fat legs.

But Shimmelè’s ideals varied often, hovering undecidedly between the hopes for a

bakery, a farm, and a carter's wagon. Yet they always ended the same way:

"Then I shall do all the work, granny, dear, and thou canst sit all day in thy big chair by the window with thy knitting, and wear thy silk apron every day as does Madam Blümelè."

Then Maryam's face would grow soft, for she gloried in this early evidence of the child's "true Jewish heart."

Maryam told Shimmelè her best tales about the great Rabbi Akiba, and Rabbam, and the High Rabbi Loew ben Bezalel, to awaken in him a spirit of emulation, but Shimmelè liked least of all her plans for his future as a rabbi, and how he became converted to the idea I shall now relate.

"A baker, a farmer, a carter!" cried Maryam one day in serious tones. "It is not for that thou hast inherited 'a good head'; nor because the Eternal, praised be He, has given it thee needst thou bob it

about like a cock. It is written, 'The forward one is an abomination to the Lord.' Thou shouldst be modest, for the truly great are always modest. Shimmelè, my pearl, thou hast it in thee to become, God willing, truly great. I tell thee, if thou wilt only be diligent and faithful, thou canst one day have the greatest honor that can come to a man on this earth. How wouldst like to be chief-rabbi?"

Shimmelè looked thoughtful.

"What does he do, the chief-rabbi?" asked the sceptic.

"What does he do? He studies. At early morning he gets up and 'learns' and 'learns,' and if one were to pass his house at twelve o'clock of night, one could still see his candle burning and him reading in his thick books."

"Studies?" said Shimmelè doubtfully.

"'Tis the best thing that a man can do, for as it is written, 'Learning is greater than priesthood and kingship.'"

“And what else does he do, the chief-rabbi?”

“What else? He writes learned books, and when there is a dispute anywhere, all the great rabbis come to him to settle it, and what he says is as if it came from heaven.”

Shimmelè's head bobbed approvingly.

“And he preaches to the people,” proceeded Maryam, “and warns them of their wicked ways, and even the hardest heart is melted and uplifted, for the strength of his speech is like manna, and the words of his lips like honey.”

Shimmelè's face shone with great content.

“And more than all the other people he is pious and fulfils the Law,” continued Maryam solemnly, “and keeps the holidays and fasts. Have I never told thee about the great Rabbi Yecheskel Landau?—Heaven grant that we may see his like again in these wicked days. Would thou couldst be like him, Shimmelè!”

“ And what did *he* do? ”

“ What did he do? ” cried Maryam. “ If I were to begin now and talk for a week, I could not tell all the good, the pious things he did. He was only thirty years old when the whole world was already full of his fame, and he was made chief-rabbi of Prague. As there are wicked people all over, there were some there who envied him his greatness, and tried to confound him with deep questions, but he had an answer for all of them. Now I will tell thee a *Maiselè* (story)—a better one thou hast never heard—how at last he showed them what he was, and how they then left him in peace. One day there came two men to him, crying, ‘ Help, rabbi, help.’ ‘ Woe is me!’ cried the one. ‘ This man is a thief; he has stolen all I have in the world, and my wife and children will now be beggars. My name is Nossen Cohn, and I am a Polish merchant, and have come here to do business. All went, thanks be to God,

very well, until this morning, when I awoke and found my bag with all my money gone. I quickly ran to this one here, my hired man, and cried, 'Chayim,' I cried, 'where is my money, my thousand ducats?' He looked at me and said, 'What ails thee? Art drunk or mad? What dost mean to call me Chayim? Am I not Nossen Cohn, the merchant, and thou Chayim, my hired man?' 'Great God of Israel!' I cried. 'The man is utterly mad,' and now he insists that I am the hired man and he the merchant. For God's sake, rabbi, get me back my money, or my wife and children are beggars.' And now the other man began and told the same story, only with more tears, with more lamentations. The rabbi knew not what to do. The men were strangers, no one knew them. He talked to each one separately to try and soften their hearts, and spoke of God's Law and God's wrath, but it was of no use. Each swore he was Nossen Cohn, the merchant,

and the other Chayim, the hired man. Then the rabbi sent them away, and told them to return the next day. All night the rabbi sat over his big books and 'learned' and prayed. In the morning he told his servant to seat the men, when they came, in the ante-room, there to wait until he should call them. Well, when they came, the servant did as he was told. And while the men sat without waiting, they heard the rabbi in his room thundering and stamping about as if in great rage. Suddenly he flung open the door and roared: 'The hired man come in first!' Quickly the hired man started from his seat, then he bethought himself, but it was too late. Reb Yecheskel now had his *Ganef* (thief), and the man had to confess and give the merchant back his money. When the people heard of what their rabbi had done, they all were dumb with wonder; even the envious ones now saw that Yecheskel Landau had a piece of the wisdom

of Solomon. *Ai*, Shimmelè, what a man, what a *Zaddik*, humble and pure in spirit although he was great, not like the wicked ones of nowadays. They pray and fast and beat their breasts, and next day are as bad as ever. They forget what is written, that charity is better than prayers. Nay, he was not of that sort, a *zerbrochener Jüd* (contrite of spirit) he was, and every Monday and Thursday he fasted just as if it were *Tisho b'Av* (the fast of the destruction of the Temple), from evening to evening, and not a bite or drop passed his lips. Shimmelè, Shimmelè, if thou couldst become like the great Yecheskel Landau!"

"Fast twice a week!" Shimmelè's jaw dropped with utter consternation.

"But he was a mighty man," proceeded Maryam, "strong in body as in spirit, and when he ended his fast and sat down to table, they say of him that he ate—thou wilt never guess, not if thou wert to guess

from now until the Messiah comes, what he ate."

"What?"

"*A whole roast turkey!*"

Shimmelè's face cleared as if by magic.

"A whole roast turkey!" he gasped delightedly, and in his eyes shone a high determination.

"Babelè," he cried with fine resolve, "I'm going to study terrible hard—'Sayings' three times a week, and sleep on my *Chumesh* (Pentateuch). Oh, wouldn't I just love to be chief-rabbi!"

VI

THE BACKSTUB

VI

THE BACKSTUB

In a way Maryam might have filled the office of a mercantile agency for Maritz; she knew perfectly whose business was flourishing and whose on the wane, who was provident and who was shiftless; yet her investigations were of the simplest, being made in her own house. The source of her knowledge, indeed, was nothing else than the *Shalet*-pots, which contained the Sabbath dinners. These were brought to her Friday afternoon, tightly covered and hermetically sealed with paste made of flour and water, yet Maryam had but to take one in her hands, and she knew what it contained.

“How canst tell?” asked Shimmelè.

“May I live,” laughed Maryam, “but that is a foolish question. Shall thy old

Babè not know a pot of peas from one of goose with rice?"

Some brought their pots themselves; a few of the rich ones had a servant; many were brought by Eisak Schulklopfer's Yainkelè, one of whose numerous occupations was that of carrying to and fro the Sabbath dinners.

And Maryam pushing the pots into the great oven would speak thus:

"*Hastu gesehen!* Noodles with chicken! Did Anshel win the first prize in the lottery?" or:

"*Shalet*, eggs, and *Kugel!* Is that all? Hm! Reb Noach is also one of those who lives only to eat!" or:

"*Wai*, 'tis a light pot this of Loser Perelles, a little peas and barley, *oser* a sign of meat. Such a *Shlemiel*, with his everlasting praying. He will, *nebbich*, soon be entirely *mechulleh* (bankrupt)."

When she could, Maryam helped out a deficiency, but this was connected with

great care, and involved an intricate system of strategy, for her troubles were peculiar ones. The greatest of them was based upon a precept that has never been printed in any book of ethics. In fact, Maryam invented it herself and for her own needs. It was this: "Never let them thank you. If they insist, run!"

Maryam was a socialist, a protestant by nature, she chafed at the slow progress of the world towards Messianic perfection. Yet there was one institution in the Gass that pleased her, for it was based upon this her precept. This was the Burial Society.

I would that our modern charity organizations might have had a lesson of the Burial Society in the Gass. I would that our tender-hearted committees who line up the poor like cattle and brand them before the face of man—I would that they might have studied the methods of the Burial Society in the Gass. And our teach-

ers, those honored makers of the nation, who cry without a tremor, "All children who are too poor to buy books, please rise!"—the little ones pale and tremble, and often the pain draws such bitter tears—would that they might have learnt the tenderness of the Burial Society in the Gass!

When a death occurs there, whether in the house of the rich or the poor, the Society sends two locked boxes to the bereaved. One contains the funds of the Society, the other is empty. The fund must then be transferred from one box to the other, and in the process one may add to it, or take from it, or leave it intact. The boxes are then returned locked, and no one knows or can know who has made a donation or who has a charity funeral.

Maryam approved of this institution (she had her own burial money and grave-clothes put safely away in her *Kist*) only to chafe because there were not similar ones

for the providing of food and clothes for the poor.

On a Friday afternoon in midwinter, Maryam stood in the *Backstub* at her work; all the Sabbath-pots were in save that of Loser Pereles.

"It's late," she said, "I wonder what's the matter with Belè, she has not sent her *Shalet*."

"Shall I go fetch it?" said Shimmelè.

"No, no," cried Maryam, but to herself she said, "Alas, there may be none."

It was growing dark, Eisak Schulklopfcr was crying through the street, warning the people of the approaching Sabbath, and Maryam looked out of the window with an anxious air.

"Perhaps, God forbid, Mairelè is sick," she said presently. "Yentelè told me he has a cold on his chest. Go, Shimmelè, go. Say I'd like to know how Mairelè is. Thou canst also sniff a little whether they have baked their *Barches* (Sabbath bread)."

"I can also ask them for their *Shalet*," said Shimmelè, the clever.

"Do not dare!" cried Maryam, with such vehemence that Shimmelè looked in surprise.

"*Nu?*" she cried eagerly when he returned.

"Mairelè and the rest are, thank God, well, and I sniffed, but it smelled not of *Barches*."

"What was Belè cooking?"

"She was not cooking."

"Then was her supper already on the table?"

"I saw nothing on the table. She was cutting bread, and her eyes were red."

"And Loser?"

"He stood in the corner with his *Sid-dur*, and he was praying."

"*Wai*," lamented Maryam in her heart, and though it is bidden to be joyous on the Sabbath, she that evening sighed deeply over her prayer-book.

The next day, as Maryam and Shimmelè were seating themselves for dinner, the little one cried suddenly:

“Why have we such a big potful of *Shalet* to-day, Babelè?”

Maryam fidgeted, looked at Shimmelè uneasily, and said, while the blood rushed to her face (she was such a poor liar):

“I thought it was our turn to have some *Orchim* (beggar-guests) this week.”

“But we just had one last week.”

“I know it, but I had forgotten,” and Maryam murmured something about Yentelè, who sits around when one is busiest, and whose mouth goes like a wind-mill until one does not know where one’s head stands.

Shimmelè had a good plateful of the *Shalet*, the meat being to the peas and barley as one is to ten. A reckless child might have got away with it at a bite, but Shimmelè appreciated its value, and by taking tiny morsels with great spoonfuls of

the porridge, he managed to have meat through the whole meal.

Maryam took upon her plate as much as one could hold upon the end of a fork and nibbled at it.

“Why dost not eat, Babelè?” asked Shimmelè.

“My stomach is not well.”

“Art sick?” cried Shimmelè.

“*Nu, nu*, thou needst not right away make a fuss. I had too much *Barches* for my breakfast, and it disagreed with me. What of it?”

“Thou hadst best eat a little, Babelè,” urged Shimmelè.

“Nay, nay, I have a pain.”

It was not the first time that Shimmelè had known his grandmother to be not well at the stomach, but never had he heard her complain of pain.

“Shall I get the doctor?” he cried in alarm.

"*Ach*, nonsense, a doctor! A doctor is good when one doesn't need him."

"*Nu*, eat a little anyhow. 'Tis good, the *Shalet*."

"Not a mouthful could I swallow," declared Maryam.

Shimmelè ate in silence, and Maryam sighed.

"Such a potful, 'tis a sin!" she said after a pause, looking expectantly at Shimmelè, but he was busily eating and did not notice.

"What can we do with such a great potful? We could not eat that, not in three Sabbaths," she pursued, and her face grew eager.

Shimmelè was reckoning how many bites to make of his meat to balance with the porridge, and was blind to Maryam's distress.

"I wonder at thee, how thou canst eat without a care while many a poor child perhaps hungers!" she now cried.

Her reproachful tone was strange, and Shimmelè became thoughtful. "If they hunger, why dost not give them our *Shalet*?" he asked.

Maryam beamed.

"As I live, Shimmelè, thou art right. Run, quick, and take it to them. I'll just wrap it up. Need the whole Gass see what thou carriest there?"

"Where?" cried Shimmelè, who had a dismaying vision of himself running wildly from house to house in quest of starving children.

"Hast thou not said it thyself? Where then if not to Loser Pereles? And tell his wife Belè that I was expecting guests, and they did not come, and we cannot eat so much *Shalet*, not in three Sabbaths, and I have a bad stomach, and can eat nothing at all, and it is a sin to waste God's blessings, and she should please do me the kindness and give it to her children, and tell her, I said, I know it can happen to anyone to

have so much left over from the week that one does not need a *Shalet*, but for children it is healthy to have a little something warm in the stomach, and she should please do me the kindness and give it to her little ones."

Maryam awaited Shimmelè's return with an anxious air, as though she had sent him to borrow a thousand gulden. In a few minutes he was back, the pot still in his hands.

"She said," he reported, "I should tell thee that, thank God, she is not yet a beggar, and yet has bread for her children, and when she becomes a *Schnorrerin* she'll let thee know, and until then thou shouldst keep thy *Shalet*."

"So—hm!" said Maryam. "What had they for dinner?"

"I saw no dinner."

Maryam set her lips as she put on her shawl.

"Now *I* go," she said with the tone of

one bound to bring a refractory criminal to terms.

Entering Pereles' house, she found Loser sitting at the table, "learning" out of a large Talmud volume. The children were by the stove, which contained little fire, playing with a *Trenderl* (top) quietly as though some one were asleep near by. Everything was spotlessly clean, and though the table was empty, snowy linen gleamed upon it. As Maryam entered, the inner door opened, and Belè stepped into the room. Like her house festive though joyless, she was dressed in her Sabbath clothes, but her eyes were red and swollen with weeping, and her mouth was drawn bitterly.

At sight of her misery Maryam's face changed; she became timid and apologetic in a moment; she was again borrowing a thousand gulden.

"Why dost thou insult me, Belè," she said gently, "and through the mouth of a child?"

Belè was melted, she burst into tears.

“No one ever yet insulted me by saying I do not feed my children and sending me food into the house as if I were a beggar,” sobbed she.

“I am an old woman,” said Maryam, talking fiercely to hide a tremor, “thou a young one, and when I ask thee to do me a favor, it is no insult. Can I help it, if my old head is growing weak, and by mistake I cook a potful of *Shalet* that my Shimmelè and I could not eat, not in three Sabbaths?”

“You did it on purpose,” wept Belè.

“Now she would tell me yet that I lie!” cried Maryam, growing red in the face.

“Why do you not save your *Shalet* for to-morrow then? Where is it written, you must eat it all to-day?”

“Have I not told thee, I have a sick stomach? Thou couldst lay me down a ten-gulden gold piece and I could not swallow a mouthful. And those *Kinderleben*,”

she went on evasively, turning to the children, who eyed with hungry looks the pot on the table, "are those faces for the Sabbath? Hast not learnt it is a sin to keep our dear holy Sabbath with long faces and tears?"

Loser for the first time now looked up from his book.

"Madam Maryam is right," he said. "It is written, thou shalt rejoice in thy Sabbath. Have not our sages said, thou shalt celebrate thy festivals half for God and half for thyself? So, if thou takest not the *Shalet*," he continued argumentatively, his gaze roving longingly to the *Shalet*-pot, "thou sinnest doubly; first in that thou makest not joyful thy Sabbath, and secondly in that thou grieveest Madam Maryam, and thus makest joyless her Sabbath. Also it is written that man should not be proud. Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Simon ben Yochai that a proud man is like an idolater, for in Proverbs, sixteenth chap-

ter, fifth verse, it says of the proud: 'He who is proud of heart is an abomination unto the Lord,' and in the fifth book of Moses, seventh chapter, twenty-sixth verse, it says of idolatry, 'Thou shalt not bring an abomination into thy house.' Man was created on the sixth day that he be not proud, for the flea was created before him."

Belè in direct defiance of this last reprimand looked proudly through her tears at her husband, as the Hebrew quotations flowed glibly and in a beautiful sing-song from his lips.

Maryam in the meantime had taken some plates from the shelf, and helped each of the children to a great spoonful of the *Shalet*. The little ones sniffed the fragrant mess, which was still steaming pleasantly, and looked pleadingly at their mother. She could not resist them.

"Say grace, children," came the tremulous consent, and they fell to in a breath.

Maryam now was edging nervously towards the door.

“God will reward you, Madam Maryam *Leben*,” wept Belè, grasping the old woman’s hand, but Maryam drew her hand back, and colored as though she had been caught stealing.

“Look, look,” she cried, “how Mairelè is stuffing; he will choke himself entirely,” and Belè’s head was hardly turned when she darted out of the door, and fled down the street as though the “evil one” were in pursuit.

“Babelè,” cried Shimmelè in wonder, “art going to eat bread?”

“Wouldst have me desecrate the holy Sabbath by fasting as if it were *Tisho b’Av* (fast of the destruction of the Temple)?” cried Maryam.

“But thy stomach!”

“*Nu*, a bite of bread won’t hurt me. My stomach feels a little better even now,” said Maryam, and ate bread with appetite.

VII
A DILEMMA

VII

A DILEMMA

Both Shimmelè and Belè were still comparative strangers in the Gass. They did not yet know that Maryam's bad stomach was always connected with some want among the poor, and had long since become a standing joke. In fact, the only way to learn this was through time and experience, for a joke on Maryam the wise, the just, the pious, dared be referred to only in whispers, or with smiles and winks.

To Shimmelè alone it was decreed that the knowledge of it come like a blow. It was the penalty he paid for his greatness, and the offender was the archenemy, Yainkelè.

Like all possessors of prominent gifts, Shimmelè remained not long unpunished. The youth of the Gass were forever having

his superiority flaunted in their faces, were forever seeing him raised to the skies, and crowned with laurel, and those who did not respect and admire, hated and envied and dreamed vengeance. Even great boys who could say off their first page of Talmud "like water" had to hear a reprimand such as:

"A shame on thee, Muhmè Maryam's Shimmelè was not yet two years old when he could say, 'Blessed be He and blessed be His Name.'"

Such prominence could not but attract the stinging gnats of envy and spite, and they spared not the hide of our little ghetto lion. The sharpest sting was Yainkelè Eisak Schulklopfers, for his grievance was the deepest.

Yainkelè had a head of which his father said in despair, "It is so thick, one could batter down walls with it," and the teacher in the *Cheder* (school) dinned in his ears continually, "Shimmelè knows

more in one hair than thou in thy whole head."

Whereas Shimmelè was going along trippingly towards Moshè *Rabbenu* (Moses our teacher), Yainkelè, four years older, stuck fast at, "God said, 'Let there be light.'" And Shimmelè had a way of crying out from fortified places:

"Yainkelè, is it not yet light?"

Hence Yainkelè's animosity. He sought revenge in many ways; most assiduously he pursued a chase after abusive epithets, and the moment he had bagged a new one, he flew to deliver it where he felt it would do the most good, in other words, at Shimmelè's head.

From a beggar-scholar he had learnt a fierce-sounding curse, which was delivered in connection with the name Mendelssohn, and accompanied by spitting.

Yainkelè sped with his prize to the hated genius.

"Hi, thou—*atheist!*" and then he spat.

It took Shimmelè like a blow under the belt, and left him gasping, but by evening he was back at him.

“Hey—thou *Amhoretz* (ignoramus)!” roared Shimmelè.

Yainkelè only put out his tongue.

“*Chazzer* (pig)” roared Shimmelè.

Yainkelè jeered hilariously.

“Philosopher!”

Yainkelè reeled, and once more was Virtue triumphant, and Vice lay groveling in the dust.

But on a day particularly fruitful of malice, Yainkelè planted himself, legs apart, hands in pockets, across the way, and cried sneeringly to Shimmelè:

“How is thy Babè’s sick stomach?”

Shimmelè was perplexed, for Yainkelè’s tone meant war, and he could not see how his grandmother was involved. He shrugged his shoulders, and curled his lips, which eloquent gestures said as plainly as words, “A *Chammer* (ass)!”

"She never has a sick stomach," taunted Yainkelè.

"What knowest thou of my Babè's stomach?" cried Shimmelè with withering scorn.

"More than thou," laughed Yainkelè impishly.

"As much as of thy *Chumesh* (Penta-teuch), perhaps," sneered Shimmelè.

"She just makes believe," shrieked Yainkelè.

"Sheep's-head!" roared Shimmelè. "She has no sick stomach to-day, but when she has, thou couldst lay her down a ten-gulden gold piece, and she could not swallow a bite," then he walked haughtily on, for Yainkelè was both taller and stronger.

"*Nu*, my father says she need have none this time," yelled Yainkelè after him, "for the doctor said, Hendel dare have nothing but soup, and her children are going to eat at Malka Loew's."

The blow so blinded Shimmelè that he walked straight into a fence, where he stood and hid his face until the sting had gone out of it. And the shock added to his years; when he recovered he knew his grandmother. After that he had but to observe the faintest symptom of digestive disorder in Maryam, when he immediately cast about in his mind for the subject of the greatest want in the Gass, and suggested that it be relieved.

“My Shimmelè,” boasted Maryam, “has a nose for suffering, like a pig for truffles.”

* * *

The days following the Sabbath of Shimmelè's recent experience of his grandmother's sick stomach were uneasy ones in the *Backstub*. Maryam was under necessity of working with one eye on the window, and to roll a sheet of noodle-dough to the thinness of transparency and still keep it flawless is a matter of no small difficulty, even when both eyes assist in the

task. At sight of a woman with a parcel coming down the street, she would start nervously and cry:

“Shimmelè, come quick, look, is she carrying a pot?”

“No,” said Shimmelè, who was not merely Maryam’s newspaper but on occasion also her spectacles, “no, it is Gitel Schuster carrying home a bundle of old shoes.”

The reward of Shimmelè’s daily diligence was a story told by Maryam in the dark, her knitting-needles clicking a lively accompaniment, for Maryam always reserved her knitting for the evening, it being economical labor, the only kind that can be performed without light.

During this troubled week Maryam’s stories were all of one kind.

“It is told of Rabbi Chanina,” said she one night, “that in his town there lived a poor man who would not take alms, so the rabbi *lent* him money, but when the time

came to pay, the poor man could not. Now the rabbi on his way to *Schul* had to pass this poor man's house, but rather than do this, and thus remind him of his debt, and put him to shame, the rabbi walked a different road, a full mile out of his way each time; because it is written: He who has lent to another shall not pass him by, lest he put him to blush."

Another time she related this:

"Once, long ago, in the good old time when lived our pious ancestors, whose memory be for a blessing, there lived in a certain town a wise and pious man; his name was Mar Ukba. He had a neighbor who was so poor that sometimes he had not bread to eat, and he and his wife and children all hungered together. But though he was poor, he was very proud and would not take alms, and on Friday his wife would burn twigs in her oven, so that the people, seeing the smoke rise out of the chimney, might think she was baking her

Sabbath-bread. But they could not fool Mar Ukba. Thou canst think how it pressed upon his heart to see such misery. So what did he do? He went in secret, when none was looking, and each week slipped a piece of money through a crack in the poor man's door.

“Now, the poor man wanted to know who his benefactor might be, so he lay in wait for him, and once when Mar Ukba came again with money to his door, the man sprang out; but Mar Ukba turned and fled; the man after him. They ran and ran through the whole of the town, until at last, at a turning, Mar Ukba ran into a field where stood a flax oven. Into this he crawled to hide until the man was gone; but the oven was hot, and the heat overcame him, and when they found him he was half dead; but he did well, for it is written: Thou shouldst rather cast thyself into a burning oven than put thy fellow-man to shame.”

Maryam paused.

"Is that all?" cried Shimmelè.

"Is it not enough? didst want the man to be entirely dead?"

Shimmelè reflected, and Maryam knitted in silence; had he been able to see her face, he would have noticed a troubled look upon it.

"I think there was another reason," said Maryam musingly, "why Mar Ukba hid in the oven."

"Which one?"

"He feared the man would thank him," and Maryam sighed deeply.

"Didst say Mar Ukba was a wise man?" asked Shimmelè after a while.

"A very wise man."

"I think he was foolish," said Shimmelè, "else why did he crawl into an oven and get burnt? If that had been me, I'd have lain down quickly beside the oven, drawn my coat over my face, and pre-

tended I was one of the farm-hands, and had fallen asleep."

Maryam laughed merrily at Shimmelè's boldness, and gloried as usual in her wonder-child. "A little head—a little head!" but suddenly she looked grave and said earnestly:

"Asleep! As I live, that is a grand idea. I never thought of that."

.

On Thursday it happened!

It was in the afternoon, and Maryam was making her famous *Taschkerln*, when suddenly she dropped her work, and said to Shimmelè in a nervous whisper:

"I'm going in the *Stub*. If anyone comes, tell him I am tired and am taking a nap."

Shimmelè had not time to wonder at this sudden fatigue, for her door had hardly closed when the outer one opened, and Belè Pereles entered. She had on a clean cap and apron, and in her hands

she carried a pot neatly wrapped in a cloth.

"Is thy Babè not in?" she asked.

"She is tired and has gone in the *Stub* to take a nap," said Shimmelè.

"I will wait," said Belè, sat down on a chair, smoothed out her apron, and sighed.

Shimmelè, who was at home with a cold, sat near the window, scratching curly garlands of *Aleph Beth* (Hebrew alphabet) on a slate, but his mind was not with his task. It was busy trying to unravel the mystery of his grandmother's behavior.

"Is thy Babè again well?" asked Belè presently.

"She was not sick."

"Had she not a bad stomach only last Sabbath?" cried Belè in surprise.

"She had a bad stomach, but when she came back from your house it was a little better."

Belè gazed attentively at the child, but he was gravely scratching away, his tongue

at the corner of his mouth wriggling an accompaniment; so she sighed again and gazed into her lap.

"Does thy Babè nap every day?" was her next question.

"No, only to-day." Shimmelè started at his own words; they were to him as a light on the mystery.

"Shimmelè, child, what dost say? Perhaps she is sick again," cried Belè at this.

Shimmelè ducked his head to hide a giggle, for the light had grown very bright.

"She felt well just a little while ago, but I'll bet—" he said, eyeing Maryam's nice butter-dough melting away on the bake-board, "I'll bet she's feeling terrible now."

Belè looked at him wonderingly.

"If I did not see with my own eyes that it is Shimmelè, the *Bochurlè*," she thought, "I would swear it is that thick-head Yainkelè—the *Yüngel* is talking *Shtuss* (nonsense)."

But in Shimmelè's mind shone clearest daylight.

"'Tis a good thing," he mused, "that my Babelè is not Mar Ukba, and the *Stub* not a hot oven."

"Dost think thy grandmother will sleep long yet?" asked Belè after a while.

Shimmelè cast a critical glance out of the window.

"I think she will soon be up," he replied, "for it is growing late, and you will have to go home and get your supper."

Belè gasped. She cast a quick comprehensive glance around the room, at the unfinished work on Maryam's baking board, and a flood of understanding swept also over her mind. The blood rushed to her face, the ready tears to her eyes. When she found speech, she said tremulously and as though speaking to an equal:

"I was not always poor; my father was once the president of our synagogue and a well-to-do man. There is no one in the

world from whom I would take it except thy Babè. Shimmelè, take good care of thy Babè," she cried with sudden warmth, "such a one the world has not yet seen. May every Jewish child have but half the joys that will be hers in *Gan Eden* (Paradise). There are those, Shimmelè," she said, raising her voice and addressing the door of the *Stub*, "who hide their good deeds from the world; who eat not that my children may have plenty. There are those who will not take the thanks of a grateful mother, but I know what I know!" she cried nodding violently at the door. "Shimmelè, my child, take very good care of thy Babè, she has a heart that is made of pure gold!"

With that she took her departure, and at the same time Maryam bustled out of the *Stub*.

"May I live, but that Belè is a nuisance!" she cried. "Keeps me sitting behind that door as in a prison!" (Maryam

never had a head for detail.) “And look at that good butter-dough, soft as porridge. Now let her come and bake *Taschkerln* with this stuff!”

“She said—” began Shimmelè.

“I know what she said,” interrupted Maryam, “thou must not mind her. Belè is a good woman, but she talks much nonsense.”

After a pause she asked, “What was that she said about her children—that they had plenty?”

“She said that.”

And Maryam went on baking with a soft light in her face, and when she lifted her cakes, she patted them gently as though they were little children.

VIII

MARYAM ADMINISTERS JUSTICE

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On a Friday afternoon came fat Riwkè, Reb Noach Fingerhut's servant—she who lived in a perpetual halo of the prospective *Chuppah* (bridal canopy), for of her it was said that her brother had a friend in the Province, which friend, when he is ready to marry, will have a look at Riwkè, and provided she then has one hundred gulden, will take her, if he likes her. In her hands shone the festive *Shalet*-pots; on her face a look of conscious importance; and the pots contained the Sabbath dinner and the look much pleasurable excitement.

“*Nu*, has he come then?” joked Maryam at sight of her. “Thou makest a face like a *Kallè* (bride).”

“Go long,” grinned Riwkè delightedly. “Have I a head for a *Chosen* (bridegroom)? I have other *Zores* (troubles). Have you

not heard what grand company we have? Madam Blümelè's aunt, the rich and childless Madam Vögelè Apfelbaum, whose husband has a store on the Ring in Prague. She arrived only this morning. I tell you I don't know where my head stands with all this running about. Three full covers of silver to polish, and the dishes with the gilt edges, and all the cooking. And I unpacked her Sabbath clothes. *Ai*, but you should see the dress, Madam Maryam,—gray silk, stiff as a board! I tell you, it stands alone, and real lace on it as broad as my hand, and a gold chain she wears that goes four times around the neck. M—m—, but Madam Blümelè will some day inherit a lump of gold! Her aunt is so rich that they no longer call her Vögelè, but Fanny. That must be an elegant name; it is the same as the Countess' lap-dog's."

"How much has she put into the poor-box?" was Maryam's dry reply.

“*Mei Sorg!* the poor-box. What do I know about the poor-box?” cried Riwkè with a shrug. “I only know that for two hours I have stood making egg-barley—fourteen fresh-laid eggs for the barley alone, I give you my word.”

“*Nu*, may the rich Madam Apfelbaum not spoil her stomach on it,” rejoined Maryam, and turned to her work.

In the evening after synagogue Shimmelè came home excitedly with the announcement:

“There was a great quarrel after *Schul.*”

Maryam eager for news stopped short with the *Zimmes-platter* in her hand.

“There were two *Schnorrers* (beggars) there,” proceeded Shimmelè, “who had *Plett* (tickets) for Reb Noach Fingerhut, but Reb Noach didn’t want them. ‘Give me some others, or give me *four* next week, but this week I won’t take that kind,’ he said.”

“*Ai, Polakim* (Poles)!” interrupted Maryam.

“Yes, dirty ones,” said Shimmelè wrinkling his nose significantly. “And they went home with Reb Noach anyhow, and in a little while they all came back, and they were scre-e-e-aming, and the big *Polak* said, ‘Does he take me for a leper or a thief that I may not sit at the same table with him?’ and Reb Noach screamed, ‘Does he think I would ask my wife’s aunt, the rich and childless Madam Apfelbaum, whose husband has a store on the Ring in Prague, to sit down at the same table with a dirty *Polak!*’ and the little *Schnorrer* screamed, ‘Do you know that my friend here is a *Chosid* (pious man), a *Maggid* (scholar), with whom no prince in Israel need be ashamed to sit down? He has more wisdom in his little finger than you in your whole head, you fat money-bag!’ and Reb Noach screamed, ‘Either you will eat in the kitchen or not at all,’ and the big

Polak screamed, 'May you choke on your fish before I will eat in your kitchen,' and Reb Noach screamed, 'Eisak Schulklopper, you are witness that it is no fault of mine,' and then went home, and the *Schnorrers* remained, and all the people were gone except Eisak Schulklopper and myself, so Eisak told me to take the *Schnorrers* to Reb Awrom's, because he didn't know what to do with them, and Reb Awrom sent one to Malka Loew's, and the big one he told me to take to Yossel Kummer's, because Yossel has not had a guest in half a year. So I took him to Yossel's. And I said, 'I have brought you a Sabbath guest, Reb Yossel,' and he said, 'God's welcome, guest!' But his wife didn't want the guest, and she cried, 'Yossel, art mad? We have not enough for ourselves and thou takest a guest!' and Reb Yossel said, 'Be silent. I am a poor man, but thanks and praise be to God, I have never yet sent a beggar from my door. We have

only a little pot of peas for our Sabbath dinner, but if each one will eat a little less, there will still be a spoonful left for the guest,' so the *Schnorrer* remained," ended Shimmelè panting hard from his long speech.

Maryam's eyes flashed with indignation.

"A nice world nowadays," she cried. "One must live to see a Jewish woman too proud to sit down at table with a poor man. *Wai*, what will become of this world, if that's the way they do in the pious old *Killè* in Prague! What kind of a woman is this *Vögelè Apfelbaum*, this *Fanny*! As I live, *Riwkè* was right. 'Tis a fine name, for her and for a dog!"

Maryam ate her supper in deep abstraction, giving vent to her indignation now and then with:

"Reb Noach should be ashamed to sit down to his fat dinner without the poor," and:

“*Nebbich*, Yossel, he would snatch it from his own lips to feed the poor.”

“When she pushed back her plate she said, “God is just.”

And when Shimmelè had said grace, she cried as an additional benediction:

“The Lord will provide!”

.

The next day at noon, Maryam, having safely dispatched all the dinners to their owners, was sitting with Shimmelè at her own midday meal, when the door burst suddenly open, and in waddled fat Riwkè, her face blue with excitement.

“Our *Shalet!*” she screamed, gasping like a fish out of water. “Where is our *Shalet?* What have you done with it—our *Shalet?*”

“Don’t scream so,” said Maryam, “I am not deaf.”

“Not scream! Why should I not scream? I could tear the hair out of my head. As I stand here, fourteen new-laid

eggs for the barley alone, and two smoked goose-breasts that melt on the tongue. What has become of it? Where is our *Shalet*?"

"Did I not send you your *Shalet*, like the rest?"

"Ours!" shrieked Riwkè. "A pot of wretched peas you sent, with a piece of beef as big as two fingers. For God's sake, give me our *Shalet*!"

"Don't be a fool," said Maryam. "Have I your *Shalet*? I must have made a mistake."

"Woe is me," moaned Riwkè, dropping into a chair. "I will not go back without the *Shalet*, not if you kill me on the spot!"

"*Nu*, if thou wishest, thou canst go from house to house and hunt thy *Shalet*. I'm thinking there'll be precious little left when thou findest it. Take my advice and go home. May nothing worse ever happen to Madam Apfelbaum than that she should eat peas on the Sabbath."

“Eat!” screamed Riwkè anew. “Who speaks of eating! Not a bite have they taken. You should only have heard Reb Noach scream, not the commonest woman in the street would take such treatment. ‘Why dost not tend to thy business,’ he screamed, ‘and stay in the kitchen, and see that thy pots are marked plainly?’ he screamed. Who would stand that! ‘The next time go into the kitchen and mark them thyself,’ screamed Madam Blümelè. Was she not right? A screaming here, a screaming there, that God have mercy! One’s hair stood on end to hear it, and then began Madam Vögelè, ‘I did not come all the way from Prague to listen to your quarrels.’ As I live, that’s what she said, and now she sits with her gloves and bonnet on, and waits only for the Sabbath to be out to go back home. And Madam Blümelè is weeping. It could melt a heart of stone, and Reb Noach is running about and screaming that the roof shakes.”

Maryam's lips twitched suspiciously, and she murmured something to herself. Riwkè thought it was an expression of sympathy, but what she said was: "God is just."

"*Wai*, poor Madam Blümelè," pursued Riwkè, "never will she inherit the gold chain that goes four times around the neck, and me Madam Apfelbaum had promised five gulden toward my dowry," and Riwkè fell to sobbing loudly.

"Never mind, Riwkè," said Maryam soothingly, "thou shalt not be the loser of five gulden through me. As I live, I shall make it good."

Meanwhile, in a poor little house at the other end of the Gass, quite a different scene from that described by Riwkè was being enacted.

Yossel Kummer, his face beaming with unwonted pleasure, sat with his family around the dinner-table listening reverently to the speech of the beggar-scholar.

“It is written,” the *Schnorrer* was saying in Talmudic sing-song, “that benevolence reconciles man with God. Thus, for instance, the poor man complains, ‘Why is Fate so unkind? Am I not also a child of God? I lie on the bare earth, and the rich man on soft pillows; I in a miserable hut that is not even mine, and he in a palace that he owns!’ Then the benevolent man with his charity silences the lament of the poor, and to him God speaks, ‘Through thy benevolence thou hast reconciled this poor man with me; thou makest peace between us.’”

“This is a beautiful word that you have spoken, guest,” cried Yossel, who relished the clean-cut Talmud logic better than old wine. “’Tis many months since I have heard such a beautiful word at my table. And if I had not a bite to eat, I should still be full, for such a word tastes better than a *Yontov* dinner. I have, alas, but little with which to reward you, guest, for what

is worth pure gold—only a pot of peas, but, as I live, my share you can have, for the pleasure of such a fine bit of wisdom can sustain me for a long time.”

“The guest can have all my share,” cried little Isserl suddenly, overpowered with excitement and benevolence.

“Mine, too,” echoed little Fishelè, not to be outdone, though he knew not what it was all about.

“*Nu, nu,*” laughed the mother, quite reconciled now to the guest’s presence, “there will be a spoonful for all of us. No one of us need fast yet on the Sabbath, and he who has not enough can eat bread.”

Even Yittl, the morose, who wore a band of velvet over her forehead to hide the gray upon her temples, smiled faintly as she brought in the *Shalet* dish, and set it down before her father.

“It does not look so small after all,” said Yossel, critically, measuring the pot which

was wrapped in a white napkin, as he ran his knife around the crusty seal.

But suddenly he uttered a cry of surprise, for the lifted cover had disclosed, through a cloud of steam, a great round goose-breast reposing in a nest of golden-yellow egg-barley.

"It's a mistake," cried Yossel. "Run, Isserl, quick, and take it back. We have somebody else's *Shalet*."

"Wait, wait," cried the *Schnorrer*, sniffing the fragrant steam hungrily. "How do you know it's a mistake?"

"Shall I not know? Mine was but a pot of peas and a bit of beef," returned Yossel.

"Well, what of that! Is that a reason? Have not greater wonders happened than that a pot of peas and beef should be changed to one of egg-barley and goose-meat? Wonders never cease. It is written," the *Schnorrer* proceeded, raising his voice to the melodious sing-song of "learning," "'He that followeth after

charity and mercy, findeth life, charity, and honor.' Now Rabbi Yitzchok said, 'Does this mean perhaps that he who is charitable, and strives to do good deeds, will be rewarded in that he shall become poor and thus receive charity of others? By no means. The sentence has this meaning: God will give to him who is good to the poor the *means* wherewith to do good. Is it not clear as sunlight? God has changed your little pot of peas to a great one of egg-barley and nice smoked goose-breasts that you may therewith do kindness to the poor. You would be flying in the face of Providence if you sent it back, for clearly it has been ordained that for your piety and generosity you shall this day eat goose-meat.'

Yossel listened with much satisfaction to this fine bit of wisdom.

"And who can know," continued the hungry *Maggid*, leaping with one bound from miracle to common sense, "but by

this time someone else has already eaten your *Shalet*, and if you send this away, you will only have to bring it back. By that time it will be cold and unfit to eat."

This last argument caused general consternation.

"See, it is growing cold already," he pursued, "and that is a great pity. Need I tell you, Madam Kummer, who are a matchless cook, that egg-barley to taste right must be good and hot?"

The gradually diminishing wreath of steam from the pot, together with the *Schnorrer's* warning, had raised some anxiety in the company, as the fragrant odor of the goose-meat and the *Maggid's* long speech had whetted their appetites.

"It is growing cold. It will surely spoil," was the general cry, and upheld in his step by nothing less than Talmud authority, Yossel, without more ado, divided the *Shalet*, and all fell to with zest.

“*Tatè Leben*,” sighed Fishelè with delight, when he could stuff no more, “it tasted just like a *Chassenah* (wedding).”

IX

THE KIDDUSH CUP

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Many are the singers in Israel who have sung the song of the Sabbath, and none more sweetly than that great bad boy Heine. Of its sanctity and of its joy; of its peace and its holiness; of its charm and its glory, have they sung. But had I the voice of song, I should sing, above all, of its rest—the sweet Sabbath rest. Ah! how dearly sought, how sorely needed, is this short Sabbath rest in the Gass, for short it is at best, and not until the important morning synagogue service is over, and the dinner partaken of, when for once in the week the Gass eats its fill,—which is also a pious deed on the Sabbath,—not until then can one speak of true Sabbath rest.

The peddler's pack lies unnoticed in a

corner, and Anshel himself dozes peacefully by the fire; the cobbler's bench is hid away, and Mendel sprawls grandly as a lord on his wooden settle; the shops and stores are closed, and their owners nod silently at the windows. Put your ear to any house-door, and you will hear the comfortable sounds of snoring.

The children with their tops and balls play quietly that their parents be not disturbed; the youths and maidens have another way of resting. They walk up and down the street; the maidens in rows with arms intertwined, fresh, fair, and Sabbathly; the youths with stiff collars up to their ears and thick boots creaking festively. When they pass one another, there is blushing and smirking, giggling and whispering. In ten minutes they are in groups, youths and maidens together. Ten more minutes, and lo! the whole Gass is an Eden, and in it wander nothing but pairs, man and woman, as the Lord God created them.

Maryam, seeing them pass her window, knows all that can be known of coming events. Yes, Maryam, too, is resting. The *Backstüb* is closed, and she is sitting quietly by the window. On her head is the "golden Sabbath cap," and tied round her waist a black silk apron—glories, these, left from the time when Maryam was a fair young bride with a rich dowry and a fine "outfit," and her hardest labor that of folding her satiny linen. She has a handkerchief spread over her lap, lest she sully her apron, and she never naps so soundly that she forgets not to lean lest she crush the lace upon her cap.

Two books are her Sabbath companions—one is an old prayer-book, the contents of whose yellow pages she can recite off in her sleep; the other is a large black volume with the name Lessing on the cover. Sometimes the one lies in her lap, sometimes the other, and 'tis known of Maryam that she never naps when it is the

one labeled Lessing. The older people purse their mouths up doubtfully at this, but say nothing; the younger folks also say nothing, but they look triumphant.

In the course of the day many of the people enter Maryam's room to receive her Sabbath blessing; for it is counted as precious as a blessing from the rabbi, and many a heavy-footed lad, who blushes sheepishly at the glint of a maiden's eyes, kisses Maryam's wrinkled hand with rude grace, and bows his head reverently for her blessing.

At the other side of the table sits Shimmelè reading aloud out of a large book, which lies open before him. The book is "The Sayings of the Fathers," a portion of which he must read aloud to his grandmother every Sabbath. The lines are full of hard, knotty words, and Shimmelè has rubbed his little cap almost to the back of his neck in his effort to get them into his head, but he goes on bravely, glancing now and then for stimulation at a dish of

stewed fruit which stands at Maryam's elbow. It is his Sabbath fruit, the reward of his efforts, and at the dry places he finds refreshment in the sweet cinnamony flavor which rises from it.

What matter what Rabbi Yochanan ben Zaccai says, so long as he says it quickly, and Shimmelè may eat stewed prunes and apples.

It was Maryam's habit to draw a weekly lesson from the wise sayings of the Fathers for Shimmelè's instruction and moral elevation; but on the Sabbath following the exciting events concerning Reb Noach's *Shalet*, it was Shimmelè himself who expounded the text.

"Rabbi-Me-ir-saiḏ-" spelled Shimmelè on this Sabbath, following his fat forefinger across the page, "look-not-at-the-flask-but-at-what-is-contained-therein-for-there-are-new-flasks-full-of-old-wine-"

"A beautiful word that," interrupted Maryam, "and true, and true," she added,

glancing proudly at Shimmelè; for clearly his little head was as a new flask, and the wisdom it contained as old wine.

Shimmelè stopped short and reflected.

"Babelè," he said, rubbing his leg thoughtfully, "why dost say it is true?"

"Is it perhaps not true?" cried Maryam in surprise.

"It was not a flask at all," said Shimmelè eagerly.

"*Ai*, was it not?" said Maryam in amazement.

"No, 'twas a *Shalet*-pot, and it contained, not wine, but egg-barley and goose-meat that melts on the tongue. And Rabbi Meïr said, '*Look* into it,' but how could we do that? We should have had to break the crust, and then," concluded Shimmelè decisively, "Reb Noach would have screamed louder than ever!"

"Shimmelè, my gold," cried Maryam, "'tis as I said—thou wilt one day surely be chief-rabbi," and then she threw back

her head, and laughed until the tears ran down her cheeks.

.
Of all the stories that Maryam told, Shimmelè liked best the one that was logically connected in his mind with the Sabbath eve. It was the story of the *Kiddush* (consecration) cup, a beautiful cup of silver, which stood in solitary grandeur on Maryam's Sabbath table. It was the one story that was delivered to him without an appendage, and contained but few moral reflections, and Maryam had a way of telling it, with many gestures and ejaculations, that Shimmelè never tired of it, and the shudders were none the less delightful because he knew just when they were coming.

It was usually in the evening when Maryam was fondly rubbing the cup with her apron, before putting it aside on the shelf, that she would begin:

“Five and forty years next *Purim*—”

“The French were then in the land,” Shimmelè would prompt encouragingly.

“That they were,” said Maryam. “It was a dreadful time that, the time of the French, when a single man—his name was Napoleon—took for himself the whole world, and left nothing for anyone else. In those days, many a one who sat one day good and secure on his inherited estate was next day a beggar with wife and child and thy *Dèdè* (grandfather)—he rests in Paradise—lost all we had, and though he was a learned man, a great *Talmud Chocham*, he had to tramp through the country with a big pack of flax on his back. From one farm to the other he trudged, buying flax and bringing it to town to sell. It was hard, bitter bread he earned, for he was, *nebbich*, a poor business man—may he forgive me that I must say it, but it is true—and when he should have been thinking of a bargain, his head was full of learned things.

“ Well, one day—the French had then overrun the whole land, and were as far as Vienna—thy grandfather was walking with his pack on his back just at the branching of the roads, when suddenly six men came dashing out of the bush. They had neither hats nor shoes, and their faces and hands were scratched and bleeding.

“ ‘ Save us, for Christ’s sake!’ they cried—” (Here Shimmelè would look with breathless admiration at Maryam, for few in the Gass dared pronounce the dreadful name of the Christian Messiah; but Maryam was an intrepid soul.) “ ‘ We are Austrian soldiers, prisoners of the enemy. They are upon us,’ they cried.

“ Thou canst imagine thy grandfather’s fright, Shimmelè. What was to be done? He had just come from the farm of his friend, Salmè Randar, and to Salmè he directed them.

“ ‘ Tell him Chayim Prager sent you,’ he said, ‘ and Salmè will hide and take care

of you,' and as a sign that they were not lying, he gave them his *Tefillin* (phylacteries) bag to give to Salmè—"

Here Shimmelè's eyes would rove knowingly to the *Kist*, and Maryam would say, "Yes, 'tis the same one, of velvet, with the *Mogen Dovid* (Shield of David) worked in it, that lies with my grave clothes—I made it for my Chayim when we were betrothed.

"So off they rushed, and hardly had they disappeared in the bush when thy Dèdè heard hoof-beats on the road. He quickly pulled out his prayer-book, for he was in great agony of soul, and they were upon him, a great company, twenty men on horseback.

"At the branching of the roads, which go out like a three-pronged fork from there, they stopped, for they did not know which way to go. Then only thy Dèdè saw what a fearful thing he had done. He had brought his friend Salmè Randar with

wife and child to destruction; for that French captain, if he had any *Sechel* (sense), would surely divide his company in three, each to follow one of the roads.

“*Wai geschrieen!* What was to be done? With all his soul thy Dèdè prayed to God to let *him* die, if need be, but to save Salmè and his family; but all the while his mind was not idle, for he knew, if *he* did not help, how should God? Was he Moses that God should do a miracle for him?

“Now, thy Dèdè in his travels had often gone as far as the Frenchmen’s borders, and he knew their language, but at that moment fright drove every word out of his head—it was the work of God, though thy Dèdè did not then know it.

“He went up to them anyhow, and asked in German what they sought.

“There was one among them who could speak German, and he translated to the captain what thy Dèdè said.

“ ‘Ask him if he saw any runaway soldiers pass this way,’ the captain said to this man, whom they called something like Michelè. But thy Dèdè did not reply, for he saw at once that no matter what he said they would not believe him, he being an Austrian and they the enemy; in any case they would divide in three, and destroy not only the runaways, but also Salmè Randar.

“ *Shema!* ’tis a God’s wonder thy Dèdè did not drop dead on the spot with fright.

“ Then, while he hesitated, one of the soldiers, who perhaps noticed his prayer-book, cried:

“ ‘Offer him money. He’ll sell his soul for money, he’s a dog of a Jew,’ and more such, as is their manner.

“ Now, wilt thou believe it, Shimmelè, my life, even as he spoke a light went up in thy Dèdè’s head. Then he knew that God meant it well with him, and had answered his prayer. Nothing is too insig-

nificant to hold the word of God. Here it was contained in this mean soldier's words. Now thy Dèdè saw, too, that it was a blessing from God that he had not spoken in French, for they thought he did not understand them. So he made himself very sly and said to this man, this Michelè:

“ ‘ Ask your captain how much he will give me, if I show him the way they went.’

“ When Michelè translated this, they all set up a great roar of laughing, and thy Dèdè knew he had them.

“ It was a great blessing, Shimmelè, that those Frenchmen were such a pack of idiots, for thy Dèdè, who rests out there in the ‘ good place ’ (cemetery), was but a poor hand at tricks.

“ They soon struck a bargain, and thy Dèdè told them a pack of lies—how that the runaways had taken the forest road to Rodow, how that the way was hard to find,

and he would show it if they paid five gulden extra.

“*Nu*, why should I tell a long story? In the Black Marsh he led them astray, and when their horses stood shoulder-deep in water, and they could go no further, thy Dèdè turned around and said in good French:

“ ‘ I’m afraid, Mr. Captain,’ he said, ‘ I’m afraid we’ve lost the way.’

“ ’Tis the truth I’m telling thee, Shim-melè—there was not a man among them that did not turn white as chalk, and out jumps the captain’s sword ready to run thy Dèdè through. But he had no fear; he had been saying his prayers all along the road, and was prepared to die, so he said:

“ ‘ What do you think, Mr. Captain!’ he said. ‘ You have come to steal my Emperor’s land, and now you want to shoot down his soldiers, but, I tell you, I will not *allow* it!’

“Then they began to laugh, and the captain made a deep bow, and said to thy Dèdè:

“‘I hope Your Worship will *allow* that we leave this place; ’tis a trifle damp.’

“My word, Shimmelè, thy Dèdè did not feel at all like joking, and he said to the captain:

“‘No, Mr. Captain, that also I cannot allow; with God’s help I shall take you out again, but not until to-morrow morning, for I have reckoned out that those escaped soldiers will need at least six hours start to get into safety. By that time it will be dark, and,’ says he, ‘many a one has ventured through the Black Marsh after dark, but none has yet come out alive.’

“When the captain heard this, he became entirely *meshugge*. ‘You are my prisoner,’ he yelled, ‘I command—forward!’

“Thy Dèdè did not budge.

“ ‘Shoot him down, fellows!’ bawled the captain.

“ Wilt believe it, Shimmelè, thy Dèdè only laughed.

“ ‘Look here, Mr. Captain,’ he said, ‘you are a clever captain, and I am only a poor Jew, yet I tell you, one of us two is a fool, and it is not I. If I will not, I will not; if I am dead, I cannot—well, then! And this also I tell you, without me to guide you back you will all perish here like rats in a trap. Do I wish that? God forbid! Do I not know that you also are human beings and have wife and child at home? Find your way out if you can, and I promise you may shoot me the moment your foot touches dry ground.’

“ Well, after two of their men’s horses were drowned, and the men barely escaped drowning also, they were glad enough to follow thy Dèdè to a high, dry place he knew of, and there they passed the night. And Dèdè built a fire, and boiled water for

their whiskey in his little cooking pot, that they might have something warm in their stomachs, and they called him no more vile names, and drank together like comrades.

“Then thy Dèdè prepared himself for death. He knew they would take him prisoner to the French camp next day, where he would be shot. He wrote me a long letter, which the captain, who had a heart of gold in him, promised to send me—thanks and praise be to God, I never got it! Then they sat and talked together all night, and Chayim told him how hard it went with the poor Jews in those troubled times, and how he could hardly make a living for his wife and two young children,—thy father, Shimmelè, was then a new-born babe,—and the captain told him that he, too, had a wife and a little baby at home, and so they talked together like brothers. And the next day he led them safely out of the marsh, and they went back the way they had come.

“ Well, after a while they stopped at a field, to give their horses a feed of hay, and as they stood there on the road, thy Dèdè with his hands tied on his back, they suddenly heard the rolling of drums. The captain started, listened, then quickly he cried :

“ ‘ The Austrians ! Mount—forward—gallop—’ and before thy Dèdè could catch his breath, he found himself standing alone in the road, his pack lying a little way off.

“ Thy Dèdè knew at once that this drumming was but the children of the last hamlet playing at war,—in those days even the children had the war-fever,—but the soldiers were gone. All that was left was a cloud of dust rolling down the road.

“ Shimmelè, to the day of his death thy Dèdè could not decide whether or not that captain did it on purpose.

“ It was a long time after, the French had already left the country,—they had, alas, humbled the Kaiser, and he had to buy

peace with heavy gold,—when, one day, six soldiers appeared in the Gass, and asked to be shown to our house.

“Yossel Kummer—he was then a lad—ran so that the people cried, ‘Where is the fire?’ and ran after him, and when they got to our house, half of the Gass was at their heels.

“Imagine the fright, Shimmelè, my life! Thy Dèdè had just come home for the Sabbath, and all thought he was to be arrested and brought to destruction, but it turned out that those soldiers were the same ones thy Dèdè had sent to Salmè Randar’s, and they knew all the rest he had done, and they carried a green leather box, and in it was this same *Kiddush* cup that stands here on the table.

“One of them made him a speech—it was, alas, a foolish speech—he said a lot about a noble Christian deed, and more such nonsense. The people said, ‘With one hand they fondle, and with the other

they smite him'—but they meant well, and, *nebbich*, knew no better. And thy Dèdè was not insulted, and when he saw what the present was, then he knew *how* well they meant it.

“Half a dukedom they might have given him, and he could not have been more happy with it. Not because it was beautiful and of silver, but because the *Goyim* gave it to him, gave him a *Kiddush* cup with Hebrew letters engraved on it.

“‘It must always remain in the family,’ he used to say, ‘and go from father to son, to be a sign and a hope in dark days that the Jew shall some day have justice.’

“It was to him a sign of the coming of that day when God will be One and His Name One.”

Alas and alas for that Kiddush cup! The hope of Israel lives on, but the cup ended miserably, in a manner that had broken Reb Chayim's heart had he lived to see it.

X

“VETTER YOSSEF”

X

“VETTER YOSSEF”

It had been a matter of course to Shim-melè's earliest consciousness, like the following of night upon day, or the lines of care on his father's forehead, this blindness of *Vetter* Yossef's (Uncle Joseph); nor had he ever thought of pitying the blind man.

Why should one pity him who went about the farm at his ease, who seemed to see more with his blind eyes than others with seeing ones?

At haying Yossef did not worry about the weather as did others. He felt the earth, raised his sightless face to the breeze, and said: “It is going to rain,” and rain it would, one could depend on it. Nor did he have to run to the barns to learn whether the cows were at home. He only sniffed

the air and knew. And when they were hunting mushrooms, and a bough plucked at his hair, he never swore, "dam that oak," if perchance it was an ash.

No, Yossef was a creature rather to be feared than pitied; a wonder who lifted the big barrels of salt which no one else could budge; who at harvest time swung the heavy sheaves as though they were feathers; a silent, moody giant, who sat through the long winter weeks weaving, with majestic patience, withes of straw for the binding of next year's harvest.

But later, when Shimmelè lived with his grandmother, and the intervals of separation drew forth large contrasts, he began to marvel at this strange, gruff man, who stared into the world with wide-open eyes, but whose gaze was bound by a hidden, impenetrable barrier, which not the brightness of the noon-day sun could pierce.

That Vetter Yossef went about with open eyes that saw nothing was not half

so strange as how it could have come so, and when Shimmelè returned from a visit to the farm, he would overwhelm his grandmother with questions.

“ Was Vetter Yossef always blind? ”

“ No, child,” replied Maryam, “ there was a time when nothing, not even the smallest pin on the ground, escaped his notice.”

“ Can he not be made again to see? ”

“ With God’s help, Shimmelè, with God’s help.”

“ How long has he been so? ”

“ God help and defend—more than twenty long years.”

“ Cannot the doctor cure him? ”

“ There is not a great doctor in all of Europe who has not tried.”

Then a pause and—

“ Babelè, how became he blind? ” but quickly a strange grief came into Maryam’s face, not the gently sorrowful, as when there was hunger in the Gass; not

the softly tearful, as when there was a death; but a dumb, tearless agony, an utter aloneness of misery, out of which Shimmelè stood debarred, a stranger and unnoticed.

So Shimmelè hungered on to know unappeased, for with the fine instinct of childhood he felt that Yossef dared not be questioned about his blindness, and Maryam could not speak of the tragedy of her life, which had shattered at a blow the life of her husband and the light of vision of her first-born.

Once, during one of Yossef's visits to his mother, Shimmelè, who took but little for granted, quickly lifted a lighted candle to the blind man's eyes, to see if he would wink. Yossef did not move until the flame scorched his face. With a cry of alarm he thrust the candle from him crying:

"Thou wicked one! A nice sort of creature thou art raising here," he said bit-

terly to his mother; but with a sudden impulse Shimmelè threw himself weeping upon Yossef's neck.

“ Now I believe it,” he sobbed, overcome with the vastness of the affliction, “ now I know thou canst not see the least littlest bit—poor *Vetterl* (little uncle).”

Four children had been born in his brother's house before Shimmelè, yet it was the first time that a child's arm lay warmly around Yossef's neck, the first time that a soft little cheek pressed his own. Slowly, almost reluctantly, his great arms arose until they clasped Shimmelè close, and then soft tremors began to flit over his face.

When he returned to the farm next day, he did not stamp roughly through the house as usual, but rummaged for hours in the wood-shed. Long after dark he remained within, and the family stared to hear him softly whistling to himself. When

he came forth, he hid almost shamefacedly a child's toy, a little top, within his big hand.

As at the farm, so in the village, Yossef had been a man rather to be avoided and feared or wondered at; one of whom it was pleasant to tell queer tales in the ghostly twilight—of his mighty strength, how he could twist a horseshoe into a spiral, and how once, in the heat of an argument, he had crushed a thick beer-mug, like an egg-shell, in the hollow of his hand. Or a fearful, whispered tale of an awful night in the early years of his blindness, when, after the last of his many fruitless journeys to the medical celebrities of the world, Maryam had found him at the brink of the river, his clothes weighted with stones, ready to leap.

The children of the Gass, too, had always stayed clear of Yossef; still it was they who first discovered that a change was coming over him.

One day Schuster's Maierlè paraded a beautiful blue top before his neighbors.

“ Where didst get it? ” they cried.

“ My mother licked me, and I was hol-
lering, and up comes blind Yossef and
gives me a top,” announced Maierlè.

Soon there was a rumor among the chil-
dren that Yossef carries ever a pocketful
of *Trenderlech*.

“ How dost know? ”

“ Schuster's Maierlè got one, also red
Zirl, Shimmelè has a heap.”

“ How does one get them? ”

“ When one sees Yossef coming, one has
but to stand still and bawl.”

The very next time that Yossef walked
through the Gass the air was filled with
wild howlings.

But the scheme did not work, for Yain-
kelè, the thick-head, spoilt it.

“ Why art roaring so? ” said Yossef to
him. “ Did thy mother whip thee? ”

“ No, she cannot,” boasted Yainkelè. “ I

run too fast, but if you'll give me a top, I'll let her, I'll let her hit me hard."

Aarelè Dorfgeher discovered a better way.

"'Tis not true," said Aarelè, "that blind Yossef snaps one in two like a dried twig, if one but speaks to him. One has but to bow politely and say, 'Good day, Reb Yossef, good week, good year, may Reb Yossef live a hundred years. Have you perhaps a *Trenderl* you don't need?' He grumbles something, but he laughs too, and one gets a *Trenderl*, a big one."

Such boldness was a thing to gasp at, but it was soon generally adopted, for you cannot long fear a man who carries ever a pocketful of tops. And it proved, too, a source of much pleasure to the Gass; for be it known that, though a *Trenderl* is only a four-sided top with letters carved on it, it is the best kind of toy in the world, "suitable for young and old," as the advertisement would say, and more games

can be played with it than any one has ever taken the trouble to count.

You can spin it innocently, as does a child; or tell fortunes and the initials of your true-love's name, as do foolish maidens; or you can gamble with it wickedly, as with dice, and—one-two-three—you have lost a whole pocketful of *Plutzermandelech* (pumpkin-seeds).

Yossef and Shimmelè now became fast friends, and while the blind man unfolded for the *Bochurlè* all the simple musings of long silent years, Shimmelè listened so gravely, and had a way of saying, “*Ai, Vetterl,*” in appropriate places, that Yossef, not seeing, often forgot that Shimmelè was but a child, and wandered off into paths that were all arid desert to him.

Like the crippled who strive to hide their deformities, so Yossef hid his blindness away from the sight of man, and woe to him who uttered a word of pity. He had hated and shunned the Gass, but Shim-

melè had become a temptation hard to resist. He came to the village almost weekly now, and they had a tacit understanding that Yossef should not be led through the Gass. It was as clear between them as though Yossef had said bitterly: "Need they know how helpless I am?" and Shimmelè had cried warmly, "No, they shall not."

Their manner was to walk apart, Shimmelè a little ahead, Yossef behind, stepping out bravely, at the risk of breaking his neck, his head in the air, and dangling his stick with foolish airiness in his hand.

Stupid people seeing him would cry, "*Wahrhaftig*, it goes *unbeschrieen* very well with him, considering"; but those that understood turned their faces from the pitiful sight. They knew that once clear of the Gass he would again be but a broken man walking with groping steps and tapping the ground with his stick.

These were the people who had known

Yossef in his seeing days, when he had been counted one of the handsomest men in the province. His had not been beauty of face, but he had had a pair of bold, laughing blue eyes, and a body like a young forest oak. At all the neighboring fairs he had played in the games and contests, “like a *Goy*,” said the pious and shook their heads, but he carried off all the prizes for strength. Not a maiden looked at him but her eyes lingered with loving glances, and there was a tale of the daughter of a rich farmer, a Christian girl, who all but died for love of him. He also had frequent offers of Jewish girls with dowries, but his heart was given to the poor Schulklopfer’s daughter, the beautiful, coquettish Channelè, and he would have none but her. Yet no one took these two seriously, for so long had they been betrothed that people viewed it as a game at which they had played in childhood, and had forgotten to leave off.

“He has nothing, she has nothing, on what will they live?” said the people, and shrugged their shoulders contemptuously, and Channelè’s father, the old *Schulklopf*er, scolded constantly.

“Thou mightst have Mordchè, the peddler, and thou, Yossef, a girl with a dowry,—a pair of fools, you two. For what do you wait?”

But Yossef and Channelè looked into each other’s eyes and said, “Still we shall wait.”

Channelè was one of the poorest girls in the Gass, but she had a face at sight of which men grew limp and weak-kneed, and Channelè loved best to see them so. It was known of her that she always got overweight at the grocer’s, for she threw such blinding glances out of her greenish blue eyes, that long Eisak, the clerk, could see neither weights nor scales, and there were certain young men who always made a *dé-tour* past Schulklopf’er’s house, “to admire

its style of architecture,” said the people and winked.

When Channelè coquetted too much with the men, Yossef sat white and grim, and went to dance with the peasant girls; then Channelè sulked; but soon a rumor was about, and the gossips came to Yossef saying:

“ So it is off between thee and Channelè. Long Eisak runs there every day. They say ’twill be a match.”

In three bounds Yossef was at Channelè’s side, crying in tragic tones:

“ What is this the people say? ”

Channelè cocked her round white chin, blinked at him through her long lashes, and said:

“ *Nu*, why not? Thou knowest ’tis but a joke between thee and me.”

Yossef raged and tore and swore that rather would he die and Channelè with him, till she threw herself on his neck, crying:

“Thou wild bear, thou silly goose, thou only love.”

So they loved and teased each other, and waited and hoped till came that glad year when their patience was to be rewarded. Yossef was advanced to the position of foreman of the spinners. He now earned enough to give his parents his much-needed help, and still have enough with which to found a home; but that year it was Channelè who sat white and disconsolate and wept till her eyes were red.

That year *Fräulein* Rosalie Birnbaum (which name is spoken with elegantly pursed up lips) came to visit her uncle, Reb Noach Fingerhut, the great dry-goods merchant.

Fräulein Rosalie looked at Yossef and—was lost. And Reb Noach invited Yossef to dine and sup; the ladies knit him a silk neck-cloth, and gave him a meerschaum pipe, and the people said:

“’Tis a scandal, but surely it will be a

match. The girl has money like hay. A lucky dog, Yossef.”

Yossef walked about with his head in the air.

“ He is practicing for when he will be a *Kotzen* (rich man),” said the Gass scornfully, but when they said:

“ *Nu*, Yossef, may one already say *Mazel Tov* (good luck)? ” he only shrugged his shoulders and smiled mysteriously.

Fräulein Rosalie returned to her home in the city, and a week later the Gass was thrown into a panic by the arrival of no less a person than the famous *Shadchen* (marriage-broker), Reb Dovid Maier, who repaired straight to Chayim Prager’s house.

“ Have you heard? ” cried the people. “ He has come to make the match—ten thousand gulden cash, so they say.”

They flew to the mill to fetch Yossef, and then and there, as he stood, in his working clothes, Reb Dovid Maier made

him an offer of the hand of Fräulein Rosalie Birnbaum, an interest in her father's business, and thirty thousand gulden in cash.

Thirty thousand gulden! Delicate people fainted when they heard it, and the rest stood open-mouthed, watching to see Yossef jump at it. And what did Yossef do? Hear, world, the incredible tale! He made a very grave face and said:

"Thirty thousand gulden,—really—a nice bit of money, but you are too generous, Reb Dovid, you offer too much. Nay, I am not so grasping. The money is good, but the girl, the girl you can keep." Then he banged his fist on the table and laughed, laughed in Reb Dovid Maier's face.

They had to revive the famous *Shadchen* with brandy, but Yossef, when next he was seen, stood in Schulklopfer's back-yard chopping their wood, and Channelè in her faded calico dress was beside him.

"Now thou knowest how it feels to be

jealous, little impudence,” Yossef was saying, but Channelè only dug her small white hands into his hair and pulled it. Then they laughed together as though life were one long merry-making.

Not often again did these two laugh together, for coming swiftly was that awful night, the dawn of which broke on a shattered joy, on Channelè a broken-hearted woman and Yossef stricken hopelessly blind.

XI

THE END OF A ROMANCE

XI

THE END OF A ROMANCE

Vetter Yossef was spending a few weeks in the village, for the purpose of trying one more of the numerous "sure cures" that were suggested for his blindness.

This time the remedy came from a peasant woman, and an important part of it consisted in the blind man's bending his sightless gaze upon swarming ant-hills.

So Yossef and Shimmelè, who acted as assistant in the cure, roved the fields and hills together, Shimmelè astride the giant's shoulders, his sharp eyes eagerly searching the ground. Yossef would then lie for hours upon the earth, his face bent patiently over an ant-hill, whose inhabitants they had mustered in full numbers with a sprinkling of sugar, while Shimmelè roved the fields in search of herbs for his grand-

mother; or read aloud a stirring tale, in the excitement of which Yossef, forgetting his cure, sat upright; or idly chatted, deeply intent on the working of the cure, asking now and then:

“Dost see already a little, Vetterl?”

One day, as they were walking through the Gass on their way to the fields, the following dialogue, exchanged as quickly as shots, took place.

“Hi, Rebbè!” squeaked a scornful voice.

“Hold thy tongue,” growled Shim-melè.

“Hi, look at him, a whole *Chocham*! He knows everything. Why need he go to school?” scoffed the other.

“Shut up—red-head!” roared Shim-melè, then silence ensued; followed only by an eloquent pantomime performed by the scoffer, which consisted of twiddling his outstretched fingers irritatingly from his nose and waving one leg hilariously thereto.

"'Tis the same little rascal who wanted to fool me out of a *Trenderl*," laughed Yossef. "I know the voice. What is his name?"

"Yainkelè Eisak Schulklopfers."

Yossef stopped short with his mouth open, as if he had heard an astounding piece of news.

"Yainkelè Eisak Schulklopfers," he echoed. "So thou knowest him well—what?"

"Why should I not know him?" said Shimmelè. "He is the greatest dunce in school."

That day Yossef was strangely absent and moody, and seemed perversely interested in nothing that Shimmelè did. He read a charming piece about the costly jewels of the Empress, and Yossef remarked irrelevantly:

"So he has red hair."

"Who," cried Shimmelè, "the Emperor?"

“Nay, Yainkelè.”

Shimmelè tried the serial novel and “with a cry of joy Count Rudolph clasped the Princess in his arms—” he read, but Yossef only said:

“The blockhead he has from his father.”

“Who, the Count?”

“Nay, Yainkelè.”

So Shimmelè remained silent, quietly tying together with grasses little bunches of wild sage. It was trying, but one of his earliest lessons had been that one must be patient with Yossef’s moods; he is, alas, a stricken creature. Yossef, too, was silent, it seemed to Shimmelè for a long time, but suddenly he burst forth, almost vehemently:

“Justice! what sort of thing is this they call justice! *Pfui!* a human being would spit at such, and I should believe it of God?”

Shimmelè stared in wonder at his uncle’s unaccountable wrath.

"*Ai, Vetterl,*" he said, for there was nothing else to say.

"Is it not so?" cried Yossef. "The people say that in my blindness I am punished because I forgot God's command, what is written, 'Thou shalt honor thy father and thy mother.'"

"Yes, they say that."

"They are a pack of fools! Why don't they leave God alone? Everything they blame on Him. Should I believe that because for one wild moment I forgot—for one moment—God would punish me a whole life-time? That is justice? The vilest human being would not be so cruel, and I should believe it of God! When I was foreman in the spinning-mill, there was once a man there, an Hungarian, who did not understand our language, and they tormented him, and he began a fight, and broke a wheel, and ruined a whole spindle full of flax. 'This won't do,' I said to myself, 'I must discharge this man,' but

when I bethought me, how it was but in a moment of rage, and that he had a wife and children at home, I said, 'Nay, that will not do either. Because for a moment he lost his head, shall his poor children therefore hunger?' Nay, I kept him, as would any man who has a heart in his breast. Shall I perhaps be better than is the Eternal? And if so be that my sin deserved a life-time of suffering, why, then, did He punish also my mother, who never in all her life so much as harmed a fly? When I think of her, how she works there winter and summer over her hot oven, how she never complained, not for one moment, when she sold her linen, her silver, her feather-beds, one by one, and tramped through the world with me, from one great doctor to another! Some said the trouble ended with an *ah* and some said with an *us*, and all pocketed the money, but none helped me. And this I should believe was the work of a just God?

Who dare say it was my fault? Nay, it was not, not wholly. Did I ask Him perhaps to put that feeling for Channelè into my breast, that feeling that I would go through fire and water for her? I was so little when it began, I do not even remember when. She was but a tiny thing with her stockings hanging over her shoes, when I used to save the raisins out of my *Barches* for her.

“ I was a lad of eighteen, and she a year younger, when we were betrothed. It was one evening when she was taking home three great loaves from the bake-house. I carried them for her, and when we got to her door she said:

“ ‘ They are awfully heavy, the loaves, are they not? ’

“ ‘ Nothing is heavy when thou art beside me,’ I said. Then she leaned her forehead a moment on my breast, and said:

“ ‘ I’ll always walk beside thee, Yossef’—so we were betrothed. She was a great

beauty, and though she was a poor girl,—her father had hardly enough to live on, where should he have gotten a dowry for her?—yet there were many would gladly have taken her to wife, but she would have none but me.”

Yossef’s voice had become very tender; he paused here with his head bowed in his hand, and Shimmelè scarcely dared breathe. Here was a strange and entirely new development of his blind uncle, a tale which he had never heard, and which promised great things, if Yossef would but tell it right. He fairly trembled with the questions which struggled to his lips, but this mood of Yossef’s was an untested one, and Shimmelè dared not speak, lest if he said so much as *ai* in the wrong place, Yossef should become suddenly mute.

“A trick!” began Yossef again. “A fine trick for a mighty Lord to test a man with, in a moment of excitement!

“In the night of the great fire, when

we awoke and found the whole synagogue standing in flames, and my mother stood in the street, her face like chalk, crying: 'Thy father is in that burning building—he went in to save his *Sefer* (scroll of the Law),'—on such a night, when everyone was wild, was that the time to try a man?

"When she stood there before me, Channelè, with the thick tears running down her cheeks and crying, 'Run, Yos-sef, run, get my *Proches* (curtains for the ark in the synagogue), they will be burnt entirely'—I could not help it, and had she told me to run into *Gehinnom* (hell), I should have run. 'Tis true—I admit it. My mother cried: 'Stay! for a rag wilt thou risk thy life?' but Channelè cried: 'A rag! Only last week I finished those curtains, two years I worked on the lace alone.'

"How could one blame her? She had presented the curtains to the *Schul* in honor of her father's seventieth birthday. She

had starved herself to buy the silk. And then she folded her little hands together and cried, 'Yossef, Yossef, my *Proches!*'

"My mother then grasped me by the arm—'tis true, and I think I would have remained, but then Channelè shook her braids and cried: 'Ah, I know one whom I will not have to ask twice, *he* is no coward!' A coward! So help me God—that was more than I could stand—I was wildly jealous of that fool, long Eisak, that great, lumbering idiot with his handsome face. If it was wrong it was but for a moment—I forgave that Hungarian spinner—but the Lord—can I believe that He would not forgive!"

Shimmelè gasped. He realized that he now had heard, vaguely but surely, the mysterious tale of his uncle's blindness.

"From that day thou wast blind," he ventured breathlessly.

"Yes, when the fire was out, they found us in the ruins, my father dead, with his

Sefer clasped in his arms, and I—I was blind.”

“And was perhaps not Channelè punished?” began Yossef after a pause, more tenderly. “My mother, who usually has a heart as tender as a child’s, drove her from our door like a dog. Then she would weep under my window in the night, and whisper through the shutters: ‘I’ll marry thee anyhow, Yossef, my heart. I’ll work for us both.—I’ll make lace.—I’ll work my fingers to the bone.—I’ll sell my outfit and pay a great doctor that he make thee again to see.—I’ll marry none but thee, Yossef, my joy.’

“It was not till years after, when her father was dead, and she had not bread to eat, and I was a living clod, who ate of my brother’s bounty, that she at last married long Eisak. Even then the fool could not have supported her, if the people, out of pity, had not given him Reb Yainkev’s place.

“Nay—nay—that was not the work of the Lord—He had nothing to do with it. Dost remember, Shimmelè, how thou didst read that all those little specks in the sky that look like a floorful of glass splinters, how every one is a great world, bigger than this one? *Ai*, the Lord has enough to do to look after them all. I’m thinking, it is when the Lord’s back is turned that the great calamities happen on earth. Perhaps when He looked down on earth, and saw that I had gone blind, and that my father was dead, and Channelè weeping her eyes out, day and night, and saw the awful grief of my mother, I think He must have wept Himself when he saw it. It was a mighty woe.”

Yossef spoke no more. He seemed lost in deep revery, which Shimmelè feared to disturb with questions as to those mysterious persons, long Eisak and the beautiful Channelè.

“There used to be a little sunny bench

in the synagogue yard, right opposite the windows of the Schulklopfer's house," began Yossef after a while. "Is it still there?"

"Who should have taken it away?" laughed Shimmelè.

"Dost know," said Yossef hesitatingly, while a light flush spread over his face, "I have a mind I should like to sit once again on that little sunny bench in the synagogue yard. It was my favorite spot where to spend the Sabbath afternoon."

Shimmelè bundled together his herbs, books, and papers, and, taking Yossef's hand, led him briskly on, until they were seated side by side in the synagogue yard.

Yossef seemed to palpitate with a strange, subdued excitement. He strained his eyes wide in the sunlight.

"To the right was the back of Reb̄ Gedalyè's house; to the left the *Shemothäusel* (where torn Hebrew books and pages are kept)," half-whispered Yossef, "and just

opposite one looked into Schulklopfer's window. On week-day afternoons she used to sit there making lace in a pillow, and her fingers flew like little white pigeons about it."

"Vetterl," cried Shimmelè, "surely thou canst see! It is as thou sayest. She is sitting at the window making lace on a pillow, and her fingers fly about like little birds, just as thou sayest."

Two bright spots glowed on Yossef's cheeks. He strained his sightless eyes towards the house. Shimmelè had drawn close to him that he might hear his half-whispered questions, and he felt the heavy beating of the blind man's heart.

"Look again," breathed Yossef, "canst see her cheek? Red and round, and on the left one, just where it is reddest, is a little brown mole, like a tiny lentil."

"I see it," whispered Shimmelè, excitedly, "the little brown mole."

"The nose is short—it draws the lip up—

ward—like a folded rose-leaf, and two little white mice-teeth—like pearls—peep out.”

“I see them—I see them—the little white teeth!”

“And her hair,—red-head they called her—but it is brown like ripe chestnuts,—only when the sun is upon it, it shines like polished gold, but that,” he said with a sigh, “thou canst not see. She is a pious woman and wears a cap.”¹

“Why can I not see it!” cried Shimmelè. “It is as thou sayest. The sun is shining on her braids, and they shine like polished gold.”

Shimmelè suddenly felt himself pulled roughly by the arm, and Yossef cried:

“Art having thy sport with me, or—art lying? It were the first time in thy life, Shimmelè!”

Shimmelè paled with amazement and deep indignation.

¹ Among orthodox Jews married women wear their hair covered.

"I was not lying," he replied warmly.
 "Everything is as thou hast said it."

Slowly a strange, troubled look crept into Yossef's face.

"Tell me," he said, "are we sitting on the sunny bench opposite Schulklopfer's window?"

"Where else?"

"Who is at the window?"

"But, Vetterl, have I not said it all the time? It is Vögelè, Yainkelè's sister."

"His *sister*," faltered Yossef. "I thought it was—his mother."

"O, his mother," laughed Shimmelè.
 "Nay, that is not his mother, she is within, by the table. No, *her* hair I cannot see—she wears a big cap."

"Then she no longer sits by the window making lace on a pillow."

"She is patching Yainkelè's breeches."
 Yossef paused.

"The little brown mole, just where the

cheek is reddest—thou canst not see it—as thou sayest—she is within—”

“Why can I not see it!—She is looking at us and nodding,—I see it very well. It is a big mole, but her cheek is not red—no—it is white and thin.”

“The little white teeth—the rosy lips—”

“She has turned away—I cannot see;—I believe—yes, Vetterl—she is weeping.”

Yossef sat so silent and still that Shimmelè looked to see whether he had fallen asleep; he was awake, but he looked pale and shrunken, and Shimmelè thought he had never before seemed so old.

“Art cold, Vetterl?” he asked at sight of the blind man’s colorless face.

“Yes, cold,” said Yossef wearily. “It seems the sun is gone already. Come away home.”

They wandered home silently, this strange pair, and Yossef forgot to step bravely through the Gass, and swing his

stick airily, but suffered Shimmelè to lead him, like a child, by the hand.

They found that Maryam had not yet returned from a long day at a country wedding, so Shimmelè lit the fire, and set on the kettle to boil; then he took his prayer-book, and joined Yossef out on the wood-pile.

Yossef persisted in his silence, breaking it only once to say, almost roughly:

“Thou needest say nothing about that we sat in the synagogue yard.”

Shimmelè began to read his evening prayers, but his mind was not with them. It was busily striving to solve the mystery of the afternoon's happenings. Like the scattered beads of a necklace Yossef's strange talk and more strange behavior lay in his mind; he felt that they belonged together, but he could not find the thread upon which to string them to a whole.

The gray, cool twilight stole into the Gass, and Shimmelè ventured to suggest

that it was time to go in, but Yossef did not move.

“Men are like years,” he began slowly, half murmuring as if to himself. “Some are fruitful and joyous; some are empty and sorrowful; some end in a happy comfortable winter and some in—a famine.”

Shimmelè sighed, for life was very dull when Yossef philosophized.

“The great danger is in the summer,” pursued Yossef. “I have seen years whose spring was dead and cold,—it seemed hopeless,—yet a week of sunshine and all was well again; but in the summer, a single hail-storm and the rich fields lie dead and broken. So with man. The spring of his life may seem hopeless—it is like the tears of a child; but when in the summer of his life there is a woman for whose sake he would give up home and country, would leave father, mother, brothers, sisters—”

At last Shimmelè understood. He laid

his little soft hand on Yossef's large rough one.

"I know, Vetterl," he said sympathetically, "thou meanest his granny."

Yossef threw back his head and uttered a wild laugh; then he buried his face in his hands.

Shimmelè looked up at the strange noises he was making, and saw in amazement that tears were trickling out between the large rough fingers.

Was Yossef laughing? Was he weeping? He did not know.

It was many years after, when first the light in a maiden's eye set his heart a-bounding, that Shimmelè knew.

XII

WHY SHIMMELÈ NEVER PLAYED

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A superficial observer might remark carelessly it was because he had no time. "Indeed, what child in the Gass has time for play?" says he. "There are few so young and weak there who must not run with the grown-up in the fierce race for bread, and little fingers which cannot yet wield the broom already ply the knitting-needles."

Take a day in Shimmelè's life. Up before dawn and at prayers; breakfast, then running Maryam's errands; and then pounding sugar, which is a slow, laborious process, the sugar being hard and Shimmelè's arms small and weak; then synagogue; school until noon; dinner in haste, for there are dishes to wash and pans to scrape; school again, with an interval for synagogue; supper; a chat or story in the

dark with Maryam over her knitting; night-prayers, and to bed.

Where, then, is there time for play? Nonsense! Is play, then, a matter of such narrow limitations as time?

There are a hundred games, the best in the world, with nuts or tops or balls; and beautiful quiet ones for the girls, who dare not shout and romp (it is not proper for little Jewish maidens), where you stamp your foot and clap your hands and turn about as in a dance, all of which are played while you are going to or coming from school.

There is a splendid game, which in our language might be called "shinny," and which is played with a pebble and a crooked stick (a little brother to golf), while you are going to the pump for a pail of water.

No time, indeed! I know a lovely game that can be played while you are parting your hair at the glass. This is

another, a better has never been invented, and you play it at table, in the time it takes the grown-ups to sip half a cup of tea. You eat the crumb of your slice of bread, when lo! the round crust is a magic ring with which you can wish anything in the universe. You'd like a train of magic steam-cars? Very well; one bite—two bites, out of the ring, and there you are, all ready, with a beautiful, tall smoke-stack to the engine, and—choo-choo-choo away you go, to that glorious land to which never a school-master has found the way; that wonderful land where the brooks flow honey, and the trees bear gingerbread men, and where, as is well established in fairy lore, roast pigeons fly about in the air; you have but to open your mouth and in one pops.

Here is still a better. It is played after school hours when she, in other words Aunt Lina, makes you sit in the kitchen hemming some horrid old towels which—

let me whisper it—are not towels at all, but a shroud upon which you have vowed you will stitch, sitting there the while at your turret window, until *he* shall return and free you from your prison and this evil enchantment. You scan the far horizon. Ah, the weary, weary hours. Will he never come? Below looms the high, formidable castle wall. *Her* wicked magic makes it appear but a coal-shed. Yonder the moat—the gutter it but seems. But now, even now, there is a sound of footsteps. A voice—*his* voice! He bursts into the door. It is *he*! Perhaps he blows and sniffs and cries:

“Gee, golly, sausage for supper!”

Perhaps he appears to be only your brother. Bah, you know the source of that cruel delusion. You know that he is *really* Prince Charming, and what he *really* says is:

“All hail, fair and gracious Lady! I with my faithful followers have stormed the castle walls. The wicked witch lies

weltering in her blood. Up, fiddlers! On to the feast!" etc., etc.

O it's lovely, possessing among countless delights and possibilities the chief charm of rigmarole, in that it can be carried on indefinitely; indeed, I do not know that it has any end.

But Shimmelè knew nothing of fairy magic or deeds of chivalry. He might have stood his bread-crust on end, when it is the smithy-door, and through it you drive spoons and forks—whoa there, Tom!—all waiting to be shod; or he might have made his bread into a hoop and trundled it over the table—both splendid games and simple, requiring little imagination—had he been younger. And here, at last, is the real reason why Shimmelè never played.

Yes, Shimmelè was too old. A child of six or seven you say? As if age had anything to do with years.

I know a little girl of ten who keeps

house for a large family; who knows all the remedies for infantile disease in the almanac, and who writes letters to her father in State's prison thus: "Now, darling Papa, I hope you will behave yourself when you get out this time. When you feel that you are going to be bad, pray, Our Father, and lead us not into temptation."

How old would you call her counting by years?

Yes, Shimmelè was too old to play. When other children were at their games, he pondered gravely upon the serious question of rent-money, or he and his grandmother laid their heads together, like a pair of old cronies, busily reckoning by what means and schemes and devices they might lay by a little each day, and how long it would take to save enough money to send Vetter Yossef to England, where report had it there lived a doctor more clever than all the rest, one who would surely cure blind Yossef's eyes.

Alas for Shimmelè unlearned in fairy classics! What a fine game it would have been to own the goose that laid golden eggs; then off to market with a dozen, and back again jingling a pocketful of money. *Ai*, to slap down a gold-piece on the coach-house table, crying grandly:

“Three seats in the coach that goes to England, past the house of the doctor who cures blind men’s eyes!”

There were times, during the weeks preceding quarter-day, when Maryam’s laughter, which came readily and often, would subside midway and end in a sigh. Then she would open the great *Kist*, and draw from under the linen the little gray bag containing the rent-money. Shimmelè watched anxiously, and a dull, gnawing ache, whose name was Care, though he did not yet know it, crept into his heart; for the rent-money meant a full bag, and Maryam, loosening the string, disclosed a great ebb therein.

Maryam, who would have starved rather than dun a debtor, would say in troubled tones:

“If Hirsh Randar, or Nossen Langer,” as the case might be, “would pay me for those cakes before quarter-day, and we were a little economical, I think there would be enough.”

“Why dost pay the *Goyah* (Gentile woman) for carrying wood?” cried Shimmelè once, full of a great idea. “I can do it—I am strong. Look, Babelè,” and he lifted an end of the wooden settle, growing red with exertion and with boasting.

“That’s no work for thee,” said Maryam. “A *Bochur*, one who is to be a rabbi!”

But ten kreuzer saved is ten kreuzer saved. So Shimmelè carried the wood.

On a day of that bitter winter—the “hunger-year” they called it—Maryam said, looking wistful:

“There was a great doctor in Prague who always said it is very unhealthy to eat

much meat. Once a week is enough for anyone, he said."

Shimmelè looked thoughtful.

"Yes, I think roast meat with thick gravy and a little onion in it is very unhealthy," he said. "Smoked sausage is much better."

"Smoked sausage! Who would eat smoked sausage on a week-day! I like nothing so well as a potato and a piece of plain black bread."

"*Ai*, I like black bread," said Shimmelè feebly.

"Well, if thou wishest," now cried Maryam in an injured tone, "we can buy dainties with the money we lay aside that thy blind Vetter may be made again to see."

"He will surely be made again to see. As I live, Babelè,—I *love* black bread—better than—than—plum-dumplings."

In that long, hard winter, when wood was as precious as food, and eggs were not at all, Shimmelè learnt the bitterness of

borrowing, learnt the gladness of a penny laid by against the burden of debt. That was the winter when Maryam stood until late in the night at her baking-board, making her famous, untranslatable *Garglech*, which euphonious expression might mean little gullets or little windpipes, and are, indeed, tiny pipes, like miniature spaghetti, each one rolled laboriously on a knitting needle. Although they are so troublesome in the making, and bring but little money, Maryam worked at them patiently, for they always find a ready sale in the city. Indeed, has anyone ever heard of wedding soup without *Garglech*? It were like a benediction without the Amen.

In those days Shimmelè viewed the gossip and the happenings of the Gass in a new light; his eye was all to business. Approaching birthdays of growing boys were matters of keen note; *Bar Mitzvahs*¹

¹The religious majority of boys at the age of thirteen, usually a family festival.

were his quest. The sight of a youth and maiden chatting at the pump set him drubbing his feet delightedly; 'twas a wedding that he scented.

He would rush into the house with a juicy bit, still hot from the tongues of the gossips:

"Guess what! Reb Itzig Melammed is going to get married."

"No, really,—to whom?"

"He does not know yet whether he will take Sorl Reb Shlomè Edelstein's or Veilchè Lederer's. Dost think we'll have the making of the tarts?" or:

"Hand down the sugar-loaf, Babelè. I'll pound sugar. They'll be wanting a sixty kreuzer tart, I think."

"What is it?"

"At Mindel Pessel's they have ordered the stork. Yentelè said it. He is expected any day."

On a bitter day Maryam found Shim-

melè at the window rubbing his hands vigorously and then clapping them over his ears.

“It’s the way,” he explained, “that Pawel, the driver, warms his ears. Perhaps Reb Noach will not sell it this year—what?”

“What, Shimmelè?”

“The little cloth cap with the band of hare-skin around it and the woolly ear-flaps. We can buy it next year, and the fifty kreuzer we can now lay to Vetter Yossef’s eye-money,” and he who knows not that the little cloth cap was the goal of Shimmelè’s eager aspirations, all through a long, long year, knows not the measure of the sacrifice.

Maryam’s heart rose high with pride and joy at Shimmelè’s willing sacrifice, and yet it ached apprehensively.

“It is not natural,” she mused, “such a young child—a wonder-child. God in Heaven, give him life and health,” prayed

Maryam in her innermost soul. "'Tis said they often die young."

"But thy shawl, Babelè," continued Shimmelè pleadingly. "I need not wear it around my head any more neither, that horrid shawl."

O that shawl! It was the heaviest burden of the winter; for did not the big boys jeer at it, and did not Yainkelè, the arch-enemy, call him "girlie-boy," and was it not absurdly unfit with the dignity of his years?

"O thou must wear that shawl," said Maryam. "Thou mightest, God forbid, get sick without it."

"No, no," begged Shimmelè. "I'll warm my ears as does Pawel, the driver."

"Don't be stupid, child; thou'lt freeze thy ears."

"No, I don't want the shawl!"

"Thou'lt take thy death of cold."

"Well, I won't wear the shawl!"

“What kind of new fashion is this—I don’t want—I won’t?”

The argument waxed hot and ended Shimmelè triumphant, kicking out his fat legs and roaring:

“I wont—I wont—I wont!”

But he who fancies her wringing her hands and sighing disconsolately at the sight of her wonder-child’s lapses knows not Maryam.

No, she clicked her needles in great comfort, and sat twinkling merrily.

“Thank God,” she laughed, “the child is in good health—the child will live.”

XIII
TEARS

XIII

TEARS

"Tatè *Leben* (daddy dear), does anything hurt thee?"

"Nay, Shimmelè."

"Is my mother or anyone sick?"

"Thank God, they are all well."

"Breindel and the mooly calf and the sheep?"

"They are as usual."

"Have the potatoes the dry rot?"

"Nay; why, then?"

"We have a basket of red apples and a large dish of poppy-seed buns in the cupboard."

"Yes, I have seen them."

"Then why, O why dost weep, Tatè?"

Reb Shlomè stared absently at Shimmelè, then heaved a deep sigh, and said:

"Why should I not weep?"

Shimmelè's mind stood still at another mystery. The happy season of the great Festivals was at hand. Reb Shlomè had come to spend a few weeks in the village that he might enjoy the great privilege of public worship during the holy days. There were good things to eat in almost every house; the whole Gass fairly creaked with new boots and starched petticoats. Everything was fine and festive, and yet Reb Shlomè wept.

Shimmelè questioned his grandmother in vain.

"Thy father has a tender heart," was all she said, but this conveyed nothing, and Shimmelè wondered and pondered, and began to observe his father as a new discovery. Yet greater knowledge and powers than Shimmelè's had failed to fathom this strangely melancholy nature. It was known of him that he never sat down to eat without first reciting that mournful psalm which begins: "At

the rivers of Babylon we sat down and wept." And his reason, explained to Shimmelè, was "that we may not forget that we are in exile."

The knowledge of deep sorrow left him dry-eyed and dumb, but the sight of a hungry swallow foraging for her young filled his eyes with quick tears. When, in the frequent flood-times, he went collecting for the sufferers, a rebuff from a rich man sent him off with a tolerant shrug, but when a poor widow gave him a handful of meal, his tears fell openly.

Reb Shlomè's life was a constant struggle. From year's end to year's end he fought to wrench from his few acres, which the law did not allow him as a Jew to own, the heavy treasure of lease money. When the seed was in the ground, he said, "But will there be rain for the sprouts?" When the sprouts peeped, crisp and green, he cried, "Alas, there may not be sun for the grain." When the grain stood nodding

with fulness, it was, "God defend, what if there come hail," and when at last the harvest lay secure in the barns, he could not sleep for fear of fire.

"*Soll ich leben*," cried the lighter-hearted Frau Perl, "when he has no troubles, he makes some!"

This strange nature now arrested Shimmelè's attention, and in observing it he made many new discoveries, for Reb Shlomè did not always weep; no, he often laughed; indeed, he loved a good joke, but wonder of wonders, so close to each other lay the fountains of sorrow and mirth that when Reb Shlomè laughed, he laughed tears.

Shimmelè soon made the observation that though the Gass as a whole laughed a great deal, it also wept much, and, "It is at funerals and on fast days that one weeps," he decided one day, but the next, "One weeps also over new-born children and at weddings." O the mystery of it!

To weep over a little crowing babe! But the only explanation father offered was: "It is true, what is written, that the day of death is better than the day of birth."

Shimmelè questioned everyone; among others Muhmè Shmunè, who should have been an excellent authority on the source of tears, for she wept constantly, frequenting with melancholy pleasure all places and occasions that promised tears.

"Why do I weep?" replied she to Shimmelè, lifting her red, swollen eyes. "Mayest thou never know them, *Yüangel*,—I weep over my sorrows."

On the Day of Atonement Shimmelè thought for a moment that the great mystery was about to be solved.

In the synagogue he happened to stand next to Simchè Silversmith, a notoriously stingy man, who sat in a corner weeping bitterly. To him came Nossen, the wine-seller, a wicked wag, and said:

“What’s the matter, Simchè, why art weeping so terribly?”

Shimmelè pricked up his ears and held his breath.

“Dost not see,” came Simchè’s weeping reply, “what here is written, ‘Dust thou art, to dust thou wilt return’?”

“*Nu*,” said Nossen, “is that a reason for tears—what dost lose by it? If it said, ‘*Gold* thou art, to dust thou turnest,’ thou wouldst lose a hundred per cent, but this way—”

Nossen grinned, and Shimmelè thought, “The man is right—that is no reason for tears.”

No, he could not fathom it. Alas for Shimmelè! It was not long before life answered him most effectually, and he questioned no longer, “Why do the people weep?”

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The year had been a bad one; spring floods had washed away the autumn sow-

ing; the summer had been cold and wet, and gaunt famine stared the country in the face. What little wind and weather had left the land, wicked misrule wrenched away pitilessly.

When the farmer has no money, the Jew can do no business, and the poor peddlers and small merchants returned haggard and weary from their useless journeys.

But the people of the Gass are provident. When there are no earnings, there is dowry and burial money to eat, and those that have, share with their poorer brethren.

Not so the Gentile farmers and laborers of the province. They sat in the taverns discussing the nature of the hard times, and washing away their cares with plentiful flow of bad whiskey. At first it was the bad weather, then the wrath of God, then the government, but quickly, mysteriously, as if by magic, there appeared agitators in the land, who stood in the taverns haranguing the crowds. They it was

who told the people what is the real source of the evil; they found a scapegoat for Maritz, the same that had been found in every time and place for centuries, and, as heretofore, so now its name was—the Jew.

“Where is the money?” cried these. “Has it melted like snow, or run away like water? No, it is still in the world, and who has got it? The Jews! Why do the farmers hunger? Why do the merchants complain? Because the Jews have all the money. They bring you bad wares into your house, and take away your good money, and now you starve, and they sit warm on their full money-bags. Has any one of you ever seen a Jewish beggar at your door?”

“By Heaven, no!” cried the foolish people, who saw this point. “The Jews never go a-begging.”

And it was true, there were no Jewish beggars to be seen in Maritz. When the poor reached the end of their means, there

was the congregational poor-fund, which Reb Noach, Frau Malka, and others had greatly swelled during the hard times, to draw from. None dropped so low as to beg from a Gentile, and if he had, it would have been vain, for his religion forbade him to eat the bread from the Christian's table.

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On a day in Christmas week there appeared a Jesuit revivalist in Maritz, who preached eloquently in the church on the passion and death of Jesus Christ.

On the following Sabbath, when the *Shabbas-Goyah*¹ with her son appeared as usual in Maryam's house, Shimmelè gave Bomul, whom he counted his friend, a piece of his *Barches* (Sabbath bread), as had always been his habit. Bomul took the bread, but turned his back roughly, and would not speak to Shimmelè.

¹ The Sabbath fire-woman, a Gentile, who tends the fires and lights of the Jews, as these are not permitted to touch either on the Sabbath.

“What ails thee, Bomul?” cried Shimmelè.

“Go! Thou hast killed God, Jesus Christ!”

Shimmelè eyed the older boy gravely.

“They are fooling thee,” he said. “There is only one God. He has been always, and will always be,—just ask my Babè,—none can kill Him.”

“O thou liar! The priest said it in church. I guess he ought to know.”

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Maryam’s business was a peculiarly unfortunate one. It flourished only with the affluence of the Gass. The large oven was now oftenest cold, and Maryam sat troubled and idle. She would gladly have relinquished Shimmelè to his parents now, but the crops on Reb Shlomè’s farm had also failed, and there was hardly more than potatoes and salt on which to struggle through the winter. There came a day when she arrived at the end of her means;

there was nothing left save the little hoard which was to buy her blind son's eye-sight. She would have cut off her right hand rather than touch it.

On a bitter day Maryam sent Shimmelè to the heights to collect an outstanding debt from one of her aristocratic customers. Shimmelè waited long for the appearance of the mistress of the house, but left in the end downcast and empty-handed.

As he was passing the mouth of a narrow street, he was stopped by a group of Christian boys who were playing ball. Bomul, the fire-woman's son, was one of them, and noticing Shimmelè he suddenly cried:

"There he goes, the Christ-killer!"

The other boys took up the name like a chorus, and shouted it again and again:

"Christ-killer, Christ-killer."

Shimmelè flushed with indignation, and, following his first impulse, began a defense, gravely explaining that he had not even

seen their Christ, much less killed him, but his words were drowned in the scornful jeèring of the crowd. Then he strove to walk on, but a boy who was a stranger to him cried:

“Out of the way there!” and jostled him into the gutter.

This feat was greeted by approving laughter, and the boy, thus stimulated to further efforts, suddenly planted himself before Shimmelè, and barred his progress. This boy was markedly different from the rest, a broad brow and clear-cut features of Teutonic cast distinguishing him from his heavy-faced, duller Slav companions. He was less roughly clad, and his manner was tinged with a foreign hue, and, as was apparent, he posed as a leader of the company.

“Take thy cap off when a Christian gentleman speaks,” he commanded.

The boys had formed a ring about Shimmelè and his tormentor, and were con-

vulsed with merriment at the latter's unique mode of amusing them. Shimmelè had paled with fear. In vain he scanned the faces of the group for one friendly look. Resistance was useless. He lifted his hand to remove his cap, but before he could reach it, it was plucked from his head and flung into the mud. This called forth more encouraging laughter, and the little torturer, swelling with an ambition to shine, now cried :

“ Look here, fellows, I'll show you how to handle these Jew-dogs.”

The boys looked expectant, and Shimmelè grew more pale.

“ Now make a bow,” cried the little tyrant. The boys yelled with delight, but Shimmelè's jaw showed sudden signs of resistance. He burned with shame that he, the *Bochurlè*, the pride of the Gass, should be made to bob foolishly for the sport of these *Goyim* in the street, but a blow on the head reminded him of his helplessness. He

remembered, too, that a constant lesson of his short life had been not to reply when they insult you. He wished nothing save to return to his grandmother in peace and unharmed, for he knew how she would grieve if aught befell. So Shimmelè set his teeth and with livid face began gravely bowing to the shrieking crowd.

“Deeper, deeper!”

Shimmelè bowed deeply and solemnly. But the little torturer had not yet finished.

“Now,” he cried, “kneel down.”

The crowd yelled hilariously, and Shimmelè had not time to protest, for a dozen strong hands pressed him quickly to his knees.

The climax had yet to come, the little fiend with artistic instinct having reserved the best for the last.

“Now,” cried he, beaming with a sense of coming success, “now, cross thyself.”

This was the culmination of the absurd, and the boys roared with utter delight.

“Cross thyself! Make the cross, Jew!” they shouted in chorus. But the artist had reckoned only with Shimmelè, and not with many centuries of his ancestors. These now came strangely into play. Shimmelè’s jaw had become rigid as iron. The blood was back in his face, and his eyes blazed fearlessly into his tormentors’, glowing eloquently with deep and utter contempt.

The artist felt his power going, the boys were still jeering, but the point of their merriment seemed turning on himself.

“Cross thyself!” he roared again and again, kicking and pummeling Shimmelè the while in his rage, but the blood of Shimmelè’s martyred ancestry boiled in his veins, and had they then and there hacked him to pieces, he would not have made the sign of the cross.

And now it was Bomul, the son of the fire-woman, who saved Shimmelè further torture. Whether it was innate admira-

tion of courage, or the memory of all the sweet Sabbath bread he had eaten in Maryam's house, he suddenly cried:

“Run, fellows, the watch!”

The boys scattered; Shimmelè leapt to his feet and ran, but the little horde, finding themselves tricked, vented their rage characteristically—they had learned it from their elders—not on Bomul, the cause, but on Shimmelè, the victim. All pride, all courage had fled him; a little thing of quaking terror, he ran like a hunted hare, and they stoned him as he ran.

It was dusk when he crept into the house, and sat down quietly in a corner. His one desire was to save his grandmother the pain of knowing. Maryam sitting in the dark misinterpreted his silence.

“So they did not give thee the money.”

“Nay, nothing,” said Shimmelè faintly.

Maryam stared through the dark in the direction of Shimmelè's quavering tones. With a sudden intuition of wrong, she

sprang from her chair and lighted a candle.

“Shimmelè!” she shrieked at sight of him. “How thou lookest!”

He was hatless and white and trembling, and a thin stream of blood from a wound behind his ear was trickling down his neck.

In a moment she had torn his clothes from him, and disclosed the little round back, the white flesh bruised and broken and stained with the blood from his head.

With white, trembling lips Shimmelè bravely recounted the miserable tale of his persecutions.

“They tried to make me cry out, but I would not,” he said with dignity, but when he came to the end, the ignoble end, fleeing and stoned through the street, he could bear it no longer.

“They stoned me—in the street—like a dog,” cried Shimmelè, the *Bochurlè*, the future chief-rabbi, and fell to sobbing bitterly in sheer misery and shame.

Maryam rocked him in her arms. She could not weep. Her heart writhed in utter pain; her soul burned with fierce rebellion.

“A little child!” she moaned. “My Shimmelè!”

XIV

THE SOURCE OF TEARS

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THE SOURCE OF TEARS

The frightful disease, Jew-hatred, raged again in Europe. More contagious than the cholera; more ghastly than war; arising mysteriously, none knew where, and spreading with lightning rapidity, it ravaged the continent from end to end; shriveling with black blight the fair flowers of enlightenment, poisoning the sweet sources of justice and truth, killing the very seeds of righteousness.

The aged, whose lives should have melted in the gentle flow of tolerance, cursed the Jew. The young and strong, whose lusty powers should have fought nobly for Justice and Brotherhood, cursed the Jew. Little children, whose sweet lips should have babbled innocence, cursed the Jew.

Keen minds had analyzed the evil, and

classed it with things dead—dead plagues, dead beliefs, dead horrors of the Middle Ages; a low thing, like black superstition, that shriveled and died in the light of knowledge. Now had fair science and discovery and invention uncovered the dark places in the human mind; now had the theory of evolution blared abroad more forcefully than all the ethical codes of religion the brotherhood of man, and yet Jew-hatred stalked abroad unshamed.

In many guises did it appear, parading in some countries in the fine vestments of Patriotism and calling itself Nationalism. In others statesmen usurped the noble garb of science to clothe it withal; a Social-Economic movement was its name there. In Austria it dared defile the name of the gentle Jew of Nazareth, whose pleading words, "Love ye one another," still go echoing down the centuries, and his followers called themselves Christian-Socialists.

In the province of which Maritz was a part, it went boldly naked, and people called it fearlessly by its true name—Jew-hatred.

For many years the Jews of Maritz had lived at peace with their Christian neighbors. Mutual distrust and dislike had almost vanished in a long, friendly, and mutually useful intercourse. Anshel viewed Christoph's dulness with good-natured scorn, and Christoph, who rather despised the Jewish peddler's lowly calling, admired his superior wit. It was not an unusual matter for Christoph to accept a gift of the Jews' Passover bread, and Anshel, on the other hand, though his religion forbade him to eat of the Christian's food, kept his little *kosher* pot in Christoph's house, in which to boil his dinner of dried peas, that he might eat in company with his friend and customer.

'Tis true, insults to the Jew were even then not lacking, but he pocketed them

philosophically, with a tolerant shrug, as one ignores the vile curses of a child, the mud-spatterings of rowdy boys.

But in this sorrowful year all was changed. The Jew, where he had met with kindly words, was now assailed with bitter curses and black looks. The peddlers tramped in vain from farm to farm; the small tradesmen sat idle in their little shops.

The want in the Gass grew extreme; the long faces, longer and paler. One day they found the stalls at the weekly market placarded with great sheets, bearing the injunction, "Do not buy of the Jews!" The men came home with dumb, despairing faces. They had earned nothing.

"It is the end," the people cried, wringing their hands. "Where shall we find bread for our children?"

But the end, the awful end, was yet to come.

In communities where religious super-

stitutions still becloud the mind, the fearful disease, Jew-hatred, brings with it its faithful companion, the horrible spectre called the Blood-Accusation. Popes and prelates, philanthropists and philosophers, writers and preachers have thundered forth through the centuries against this ghastly lie—in vain. To a people such as the Gentiles of Maritz, who sought the cure for their sick and maimed at the shrines of saints, and went on Good Friday to see the blue and crimson clay effigy of their patron saint weep real tears out of his glass eyes—to such as these one black myth more or less was of little account. And how the ghastly spectre found lodgment in Maritz and the havoc it there wrought, I have now to tell.

One bitter, sleeting winter morning, many years before Shimmelè's birth, Machel *Katzev* (Michael the butcher), known also as Machel *Grobian* (boor) in the Gass, on opening his shop, found Julsa the beg-

gar-child sitting on his door-step. She was blue and chattering with cold, and heavy tears, pressed out by cold and pain, rolled stolidly upon her cracked and bleeding hands.

Julsa was not unknown to Machel, her weekly begging rounds bringing her also to the Gass; and his manner had been to give her a few handfuls of meat-scrap and send her on, but on this day Machel Katzev's heart was tender. His youngest child, which had been sick unto death with croup, had recovered in the night, and as he gazed at the beggar-girl, and thought of his own little ones in the snug room behind the shop, where his good wife Rachel was warming their little shirts by the fire, and cooking a great potful of potato-soup for their breakfast, a fearful, righteous wrath overpowered his soul. He uttered a mighty curse, inclusive of mankind and the whole world in general, picked up Julsa in his arms, sat her down by the fire, smeared

a thick dab of tallow over her bleeding hands, and began to bellow loudly for hot soup.

All day he behaved so shamefully that his customers declared there was no standing it any longer, and that such a *Grobian* the world had not yet seen. Next day he donned his Sabbath coat and tight boots, and went to call on the parish priest, and when he returned he was leading the beggar-child by the hand.

“Have you heard?” cried the people scornfully. “Machel Katzev has won the grand lottery prize. He has hardly enough for his own children, and takes a little *Shiksah* (Gentile girl) into his house—the man is crazy!” And to prove their assertion they then sent their own children’s half-worn clothes to Julsa.

Julsa was the illegitimate child of a servant, who deserted her when she was in her fifth year. For a time then the little one knocked around the village, until Zip-

pel, the beggar-woman, volunteered to take her, for Zippel was old, and loved her ease upon her bed of rags better than trudging with a heavy basket. After that Julsa begged for both. She was eight years old when Machel Katzev received permission from the priest to take her into his house.

Machel clothed and fed her, and sent her to school until she had learned to read and write. He bought her a prayer-book with a beautiful golden crucifix on the cover, and every Sunday morning he might be seen dragging a struggling little girl to the Catholic church, nor did he turn back until he saw her safe within; that she might not, as he put it, "grow up, God forbid, like a heathen in his house."

Julsa grew up a plump, dull, good-natured girl, who loved Machel, Rachel, and their children devotedly. She sang and worked all day long, even helping out in the shop on busy days.

“A *Behemah*,” said the people, “that God have mercy! But she has a real Jewish heart,” for Julsa soon learned all of Machel’s tricks, and knew that if there is too much fat with the rich Frau Blümelè’s roasting meat, it is no matter, but a poor woman’s penny-bone must always have a bit of good meat clinging to it somewhere.

When Julsa was fifteen, Machel began to pay her wages, that she might not stand some day a God-forsaken creature in the world, a maiden without a dowry. Julsa now was twenty, had already forty gulden toward a dowry safely wrapped in one of Machel’s old bandannas, and, better still, she had also a sweetheart. Machel did not approve of this sweetheart, for he was a runabout fellow who lived upon no one knew what, but Julsa said he was a miller by trade, and would tend to business and marry her when she had one hundred gulden.

One morning the Gass awoke to the wailing cries of Machel and his wife, who were running about wildly in search of their maid Julsa. She had disappeared in the night; all trace of her was gone. It was found that all her belongings were in their usual places. Nothing was missing but the red shawl she always wore, and the forty gulden she had saved towards her dowry.

Suspicion fell upon Lucas, Julsa's lover; but he also had disappeared. It was reported that he lodged with a charcoal-burner in the forest, but neither Lucas nor the burner could be found.

Half of the Gass turned out to help in the search. Machel swore fearful oaths at every one who came in his path, and Rachel wept bitter tears. Then they reported her disappearance to the authorities. A diligent search was instituted, but in vain. After a few weeks Julsa's corpse was found in a ravine in the forest, and the

old bandanna in which she had kept her money lay not far away.

Who can know where it began? Perhaps one night at the fireside when ghost stories were going the rounds, some old woman repeated a harrowing tale of how in her youth it had been said that the Jews require the blood of a Christian virgin to mix with their Passover bread. Like a malignant growth, stretching out its poisonous creepers in a night, the horrible myth spread abroad, and found hold with the Gentiles of Maritz.

Thinking people shook their heads incredulously, but the myth waxed great, more strong, more wide than had it been the fairest flower of truth.

On a quiet Sabbath afternoon, the Gass was thrown into a panic by the arrest of Machel Katzev and his wife, on the charge of murder of their hired maid Julsa. The implication was a so-called Ritual Murder. Sworn witnesses arose who testified to hav-

ing seen Machel and his wife, together with other Jews, on the outskirts of the forest on the night of the murder.

The Jews were paralyzed with horror. The accusation of ritual murder, which had through centuries wrought such sad havoc among them, had been to them a terror of the distant past, like the Inquisition or the murderous bands of Crusaders; yet now it arose suddenly from the dead; not a phantom, but living in the full light of day.

Among the many anti-Semitic agitators of those days, there was a certain nobleman, the excessive manner of whose tirades had afforded much amusement to intelligent classes, and had earned for him the sobriquet of "thrasher Count." An emissary of his, attracted by the fruitful promises of recent events, had found his way to Maritz. On the square and in the taverns, he bellowed forth his vile denunciations, while the populace cheered him with fervor.

From his lips the Blood-Accusation took new authority. He rehearsed for them all the ancient calumnies of history, distorted to suit his purpose. With dramatic fire he described the murder of the maid Julsa, and spoke of secret books and laws and mystic rights of the Jew, and the people shuddered and believed.

Those Jews who still had spirit left for battle, denied, protested—in vain. There were few Gentiles in Maritz who did not know that blood is counted an “abomination” in the Gass; there were few that did not know how the Jewish housewives soaked the meat for their table to remove from it all blood, as their religion commanded, and yet they believed.

They knew that Julsa had clung with loyal love to her foster-parents, and that they had mourned for her with deep grief—and yet they believed.

Life now became well-nigh unbearable to the Jews. The peddlers were stoned in

the streets, and heaped with vilest execrations. Maryam dared hardly show herself on the street for fear of insult; when she passed, people pointed at her, whispering in horror: "See, that is she in whose kitchen they bake with Christian blood."

Women who had run to her with their sick children, now shunned her with frightened, hate-filled faces. Little children who had found their sweetest rest in her soft arms, now hid from her behind their mother's skirts. Once, when she was leading to its home a little child which she had rescued out of a bog, a strange farmer wrested it from her, crying, "Ha, Jew-woman, dost wish to slaughter this one, too?"

After months of unbearable abuse, the people of the Gass at last were roused to concerted protest, and a solemn service of justification was held in the synagogue. All the high Gentile judiciaries were present, the members of the Jewish community

appeared as on the great Day of Atone-
ment, in their death robes, and one by one
they ascended the altar, and swore a
mighty, solemn oath to their innocence of
the murder of the hired maid Julsa. It
was of no avail.

The venerable, gentle sage, the rabbi,
Reb Yoshè Levison, journeyed to the
county seat to testify, and in the court he
swore upon the scrolls of the Law, with
shame and dismay, that the Jews do not
use Christian blood in their Passover
bread. It was in vain.

And in the age of Steam and Electricity,
in the age of Liberty and Equality, there
was witnessed an incredible, unthinkable
sight; a high court of Justice in the midst
of civilized Europe conducted a trial
against a member of an ancient, God-fear-
ing community for the horrible charge of
Ritual Murder.

XV

SHIMMELE` PRAYS

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On a Sunday morning, not long after the close of the great Passover festival, Machel Katzev and his wife Rachel returned from the county-seat, where they had lain in prison under the awful charge of the murder of their hired maid Julsa.

Rachel had spent the night of the crime quietly sleeping beside her children, and Machel, as member of the local *Chevra Kadisha* (holy brotherhood)—a society whose office it is to minister to the dead and dying—had watched and prayed, together with nine other men, at the bedside of a sick man. All this had been uncontestedly proved at the trial; the sworn witnesses of the accusation, stupid tools of malice and hate, were self-confessed perjurers. Yet Rachel and Machel returned

acquitted, not honorably, but because of insufficient evidence.

Almost the whole Gass, with Machel's children at their head, had come out to meet them, and it was a tearfully jubilant procession that led the way to the synagogue, where a special service of thanksgiving had been arranged.

The civilized element of Gentile Maritz rejoiced openly with the Gass, though perhaps for a reason of its own. Yet both gave thanks that justice had been done, and their home and their boasted enlightenment had been spared the awful stain of a judicial murder. But the larger part of the people looked on with black scowls and muttered curses.

In the afternoon after mass, when the men as usual were gathered in the tavern, there appeared again, suddenly, the emissary of the now noted "thrasher Count." From an elevated place on a table, in a room crammed with ignorant men, fevered

with famine and religious hate and bad whiskey, he hurled forth his fire-brands of vile abuse and calumny; and the foolish people swayed with his words like reeds in the wind.

“They have sucked you dry, and now they eat while you starve. Take back, I say, take back what is your own. Why should you pity them? Did they pity our meek and holy Saviour when they nailed him to the cross? You are sold—sold,” he roared, “you, your wives and children, sold to the damned, blood-sucking Jews!”

Then arose Starek, the aged wheelwright.

“Hold, lad,” he cried, “that is not true, the Jews do not drink Christian blood, the courts of justice have acquitted them. It is enough, I am for order and peace.”

“The courts of justice have lied,” roared the agitator again. “They are bought, the press is bought, aye, the whole government is bought by the accursed rabble.

Down with the Jews! Take club and flail and pitch-fork—at them—at them, I say. They must be bled, the wretched Jew-rabble! We must slash, slash, slash, until this festering sore, Judaism, is cut out of the land!”¹

In the dusk of that day the first stone crashed through a window in the Jews'-street, and on the site of the old gates was found a placard bearing in red letters the words: “Death to the Jews!”

The Gass was dumb, stricken with dismay. A deputation was sent to the *Bürgermeister*; another to the rabbi. Both returned with comforting messages. But in the street stood white-faced groups.

“Are we living in the Middle Ages, in the days of a Chmel—” cried the younger people. “We now stand equal to any, under the protection of the Kaiser and the law. Let them just dare!”

¹ A verbatim extract from a speech by Graf Pückler, delivered August, 1900.

“Nay, let us go home and keep the peace,” cried the older ones.

The people went home, but not to their beds, and they sat white-faced and leaden-hearted, watching and praying for the end of a night that had just begun.

In Maryam’s house, too, all was dark and still. Maryam had put Shimmelè to bed, and was talking quietly with her son, blind Yossef, who happened to be in the village.

“Bah, what is there to fear!” said Maryam bravely, though her face was white and troubled. “A lot of street loafers who torture little children; but to-morrow, God willing, thou wilt take Shimmelè back to the farm. It is no longer pleasant here in Maritz.”

“The world,” said Yossef musingly, “reminds me of one of those deceiving wood-apples. They look nice and red, but bite into it, and it is bitter as gall, because it is not ripe. Yes, the world, too,

on the surface may look fair and pleasant, but it is not ripe—nay, the world is not yet ripe.”

“Vetterl,” came a small voice from the bed, “what dost mean—the world is not ripe?”

“Why art not sleeping, Shimmelè?” said Maryam. “It is time that thou shouldst sleep.”

“Please, Vetterl, what does that mean?”

“Sleep, Shimmelè—to-morrow is also a day, to-morrow I shall tell thee.”

Alas for Shimmelè—that to-morrow never came, and never did Yossef explain. It was life and time, it was bitter sorrow and a hard futile struggle, that at last made clear to Shimmelè what Yossef meant when he said, “The world is not yet ripe.”

An hour before midnight a man came tearing through the Gass, crying:

“Run, run for your lives!”

“What is the matter?” cried Maryam from her door-way.

“They are upon us, with clubs and axes. Run! Save yourselves!”

At almost the same moment a roar of mingled shouts broke over the north end of the street.

In a flash the whole Gass was a chaos of shrieking, crying, fleeing humanity. The Jews with their children clinging to their breasts and backs fled like hunted game into the woods and thickets, while the howling mob stormed their houses, loaded their women and children with linen and china and household goods, and broke and burned what they could not carry away. Wherever they found beer or wine, they drank deeply for new courage; wherever they met with resistance, they beat about them murderously. O pity them, you who read. Pity them; not alone the poor Jews, fleeing wildly for their lives, but this maddened, raging mob. They, too, are

victims, these drunken brutes; victims of bigotry and corruption, of ignorance and envy and hate. The Jews will crawl back to the ruins of their homes, and on the smouldering ash-heap sleep the sleep of the innocent. But these poor beasts—not until the great leveler Time will have moulded their flesh with the dust, not till then will their hands be washed clean of the stain of innocent human blood.

With the first shout of the mob Yossef had leaped to his feet, and barricaded the door with Maryam's large baking-table and the heavy wooden settle. There he stood immovable, leaning his giant strength against the door, while Maryam spoke soothing, reassuring words to him.

"They will not harm us—they are after plunder—all know me and that I have nothing."

The noises of the mob grew louder; now the crackling of their bonfires could clearly be heard.

A shower of stones crashing through the windows announced their arrival at Maryam's house.

Maryam snatched Shimmelè from the bed, and fled with him behind the shelter of the large oven, where she covered him with her body. Yossef remained guarding the door, upon which followed a fierce cannonade of blows and a demand for entrance.

He leaned his great strength forward, but a heavy iron bar, wielded like a ramrod, shattered the old pine boards like glass, and sent him staggering into the room. A red, smoky glare of pitch-torches poured upon the darkness, and danced on a mass of wild, red-eyed faces, which filled the open door-frame.

Maryam leaped from her refuge to Yossef's side, crying to the leader of the mob:

"What do you want of me, smith? You know I have nothing."

The smith so far recovered his sanity to

remember that Maryam, not many months before, had saved the life of his youngest child when it was dying of croup.

“Come away, fellows,” he said, “it’s the old baker-woman—she has nothing.”

“The witch’s kitchen where they bake with Christian blood,” cried the mob.

Just then a glint from one of the torches leaped into the polished mirror of Maryam’s *Kiddush* cup, standing in its lonely grandeur on the shelf. Alas for Maryam’s proud emblem—Reb Chayim’s symbol of joy and hope for the Jew—it threw back the gleam into the raider’s eye, and:

“Silver!” he cried, “thou liar, smith,—I see silver.”

“Back!” cried Yossef as the rabble pushed forward. He grasped the heavy settle to strike, but a dozen iron hands clutched it firmly. A black, vicious rod leapt in air.

“Mercy!” shrieked Maryam. “He is blind.”

Then followed a thud as of falling logs, a mad whirl of stamping and crashing and yelling.

Suddenly from without there came cries of "The gendarmes—the gendarmes!" and quickly the hungry maw of the night sucked in the struggling horde. Like a madly whirling cyclone tearing across the prairie it had raged in the room but a moment, and fled as quickly, leaving wreck and ruin and death behind.

There was a loud clatter of hoof-beats and clank of swords without—men, women, and children with arms full of plunder went scurrying in all directions. Then followed sudden peace—and the Gass, too, was silent and empty.

Through all the turmoil Shimmelè had been as one paralyzed. He still crouched in his corner behind the stove, stunned with horror, glaring wide-eyed into the black void of the night.

He strained his ears for a familiar sound.

There was nothing save a strange hissing. It was but the cry of the drowning flames, where the soldiers were extinguishing the fires. A weird, regular clank-clank, growing first, then fading, filled out the fearful stillness. It was but the hoof-beat of the sentinel's horse patrolling the silent street.

The world seemed dead and mute save for his own leaden heart-beats.

Where was Babè Maryam—where, Vetter Yossef? No one spoke. Had they fallen asleep, or been swept out with the mob?

“Babelè,” whispered Shimmelè. Nothing answered.

“Yossef—little uncle—” Only silence.

The night wind blew in through the broken panes and the empty frame where hung the wreck of the door.

Shimmelè quaked with cold and tearless terror.

“Babelè—my Babelè!”

“Oh—little uncle!”

He rose to his feet, and stretched out his hands in the darkness. A cold, hard something reached out and touched him ghostily. He shrank back into his corner chattering with terror.

The silence grew more dense; the sentinel ceased his rounds, a fine rain began to fall softly from the sky, as if nature wept or strove to wash away the ghastly blood-stain from its face.

O the night, the endless night. O the black, ghastly, whispering horror of the night!

At last—at last—the ashen pall of death spread over the face of darkness; far in the east a faint bloom of rose was born, growing ever bright and brighter, as if feeding on the decay of the night. It was morning. Shimmelè saw the outlines of the room take gradual shape. Near him lay the overturned table whose outstretched legs had touched him ghostily in the dark; furniture, clothes, crockery, lay a scattered

wreck together; the poor little treasure of Maryam's *Kist*, her sweet white linen, lay torn and trampled where the raiders had dropped it in their flight, and near the door—a ghostly something—. No, no, he could not look, and shaking as with palsy he buried his face in his hands.

There was a sound as of fleet, slinking footsteps; a human being—help—a friend; he rushed to the window. There was nothing—only the pink morning and the wreck of the Gass. Near the window lay the charred, smouldering heap of a bonfire; blackened remnants of tables, beds, and chairs, and towering above all, still lordly in its ruin, Reb Noach's half-burnt *fauteuil*. A twittering in the old nut-tree drew his eyes upward, and there they lingered, for in the night the first stirring of spring had breathed over the Gass, and gathered like a hoar-frost on the wide branches of the tree, dusting them lightly as with a coat of faintest green. The spar-

rows in its boughs chirped of nest-building. One of them flew down, and selecting a straw laid therewith the foundation of his house. Shimmelè saw that the straw was a bit of tumbled wisp, bulging out of a little torn bed-tick, which lay near a half-charred cradle, and recognized both as Belè Loser's—her little black cradle, which he had never seen when it did not hold a baby. How empty was the world, how silent, how strange!

A distant sound of knocking reminded him of Eisak Schulklopper.

"If my Babelè were not lying there so cold and stiff, on the floor," he thought, "she would now be at my bedside, saying, 'Shimmelè, my life, come, get up—it's time for prayers'."

Then Shimmelè remembered God. He turned to where those silent forms lay side by side, Maryam's withered hand on Yossef's breast, where she had raised it to shield him. He did not weep, he was

stunned and dumb. With a fine, deep instinct, feeling that he must hide those dear, dead forms from the cruel, searching light of day, he covered them with a sheet—Yossef tenderly—he was used to being taken care of by Shimmelè; Maryam with almost a sense of shame—Maryam the strong, the helpful, the self-reliant. She would have chafed, had she known how she lay there, a helpless clod, on the floor.

Then he washed and dressed himself neatly, as he knew his grandmother would have wished it; covered his head with his little velvet cap, and found Maryam's old black *Siddur* (prayer-book). It was too large for his small hands to grasp; so he held it in his outstretched arms as though it were an infant, and turning his face away from the wreck of the dear *Backstüb*, away from the horror of those still, sheeted forms, he lifted his eyes to the east, towards Zion, the Hope, the Joyous, whence

glowed the rosy dawn of a sweet spring day and began his morning prayer:

“The Lord of the Universe—He it is who reigned before any being was created,” he prayed, and at last the deep well of his great woe overflowed. Shimmelè wept. His tears flowed in swift rills upon the old yellow pages of Maryam’s prayer-book.

“Though all the Universe would vanish, He alone would remain, the mighty Ruler. . . He is One, and there is none beside. The Lord is my living Redeemer, my Rock in time of affliction. Into His hands I commit my spirit. God is with me, what shall I fear—” sobbed Shimmelè.



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